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GOD-TALK AND VERIFICATION

by

© WERNER WAITKUS

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled God-Talk and Verification submitted by Werner Waitkus in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the status of God-language, that is the group of utterances containing the word "God" as found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in view of the verification challenge.

The following points are being argued: (1) that the verification criterion of meaning has not succeeded in showing the meaninglessness of God-language; (2) that meaningful but non-cognitive interpretations of God-language, while having shown interesting dimensions of religious language, cannot claim to be adequate accounts; (3) that some God-language intends to be cognitive, i.e., that it intends to refer to some state of affairs, the possibility of which needs to be explored.

In Chapter I the significance of the challenge is conceded and the problems arising out of God-language are elucidated.

Chapter II briefly discusses the development of the verification principle in the Vienna Circle and the work of A.J. Ayer. Criticisms of Victor Kraft, Karl Popper, and Ludwig Wittgenstein are used to show that the verification principle fails as a criterion of meaning and that there are perfectly meaningful sentences which do not even purport to be verifiable. The view is taken that while this considerably weakens the dogmatic position of an earlier logical positivism,

the challenge of the status of God-language nevertheless remains in a modified form.

Chapter III examines a number of non-cognitive interpretations of religious language which were offered partly in reply to A.G.N. Flew's falsification challenge. The burden of the chapter is to show that while interesting and important functions of religious language have been established, believers must still insist that at the basis of religious language there are some statements which are intended as assertions in order to avoid charges of irrationalism.

Chapter IV attempts to establish a case for cognitive significance of God-language. The work of John Wisdom in particular is introduced here as a basis for the claim that God-talk might not be a time-wasting issue just because there are no readily available experimental methods to settle disputes and that it might be useful to pay attention to aesthetic, existential, and other non-experimental issues in an attempt to articulate a theory of religious truth-claims. Consideration is also given to the writings of Basil Mitchell and John Hick, and particularly the latter's exchange with Kai Nielsen on the issue of eschatological verification. The chapter concludes with the assertion that the issue at stake is far too complex to be settled by narrow empirical criteria alone and that consequently little can be gained by short-circuiting the debate by charges of meaninglessness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study will concern itself with God-language, that is the group of utterances containing the word "God" or some of its many near equivalents, as found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Whether an analysis of what is said about this God holds for all language about gods, must be left unsettled.

Within this tradition it has always been recognized that God is not within the power of man in any sense, and that therefore talking about him is not one activity that can be taken up at will. Those who rejected the "natural theology" tradition which originates with St. Thomas Aquinas, insisted that unless God chooses to reveal himself to man, the possibility of God-talk does not even exist. Or, in other words, without a prior revelation of God faith in him and talk about him are not within man's range of possibility. And even within the tradition of "natural theology" one has to interject the doctrine of the "analogy of being" to get God-talk off the ground.

It is inherent in such a situation that God-talk can become problematic, for it can become a matter for doubt, risk, and reflection. For utterances containing the word "God," whether supposedly made by God, angels, or prophets, are human speech. They are constituted of sentences that belong to the body of language and thought by which man, as he lives in history, projects and grasps and receives and loses his life. Thus men are able to call God-talk into question. And then it is the peculiar burden of the believer to show what sort of logical continuity God-talk has with other ordinary utterances. He cannot retreat to the haven of some private and sectarian communication or some "speaking in tongues" and still hope to gain the respect of reasonable men.

Language about God can be challenged in different ways. The traditional strategy was to accept the believer's claim about God's existence as a factual statement and then proceed to show that the available evidence was either insufficient or false. In recent years the challenge has taken the following form: statements in the form "God is ..." are meaningless; they are pseudo-statements, improper language which ought to be eliminated altogether.

It is somewhat customary in religious circles to dismiss this challenge in two ways, both of which, I fear, are gravely mistaken. The first simply points out that the challenge was given by the logical positivists who are now themselves nearly extinct. Thus there is no need to get disturbed anymore. Mavrodes suggested in a more careful manner that the challenge as such is so muddled that theologians are probably "justified in devoting the major part of their attention to the more substantive problems of their discipline."[1] However, it must be pointed out that the challenge is by no means the esoteric concern of a diminishing sect of philosophers, but continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary thinkers. Collins is fairly correct in his assessment that

> we must still reckon with the core of A.J. Ayer's position. Hence it does not seem correct to maintain that there is no point any longer in making antediluvian researches into what Ayer once held about natural theology. What he once thought on this score still has a dominant influence not only over his own present views but also over the general attitude of analytic thinkers who have moved beyond him in so many ways. This is an instance of selective continuity between positivism and analysis. ...[2]

And Mavrodes notwithstanding, the charge is serious enough, especially when put so succinctly by Flew,[3] to demand the careful consideration of religious thinkers.

The second strategy to dismiss the challenge is of more philosophical interest. It is asserted that the "obsession with language" or, less politely, the "linguistic madness" of analytic philosophers makes them singularly inept to deal with the greater problems of God and man and life. Therefore, again, they can be by-passed with no apparent loss. This charge calls for a more detailed reply since it misses the significance of analytic philosophy altogether.

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[1] George I. Mavrodes, "God and Verification," Canadian Journal of Theology, Vol. X (1964), No. 3, pp. 187-191.

[2] James Collins, "Analytic Theism and Demonstrative Inference," International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. I (May 1961), pp. 236-237.

[3] Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 96-99.

All expressions have, if they are in fact in use, rules for when and how they are to be used. If some person says, "Fishing smells good," we may reply, "You can't say that," and if pressed a bit more, we will add, "Fishing" is not a word for something that can smell. We respond to the utterance with a rule for how to use "fishing." The meaning of such expressions is set by such rules. When, therefore, expressions are used contrary to their usage rules, or when a new use is posited without stipulating at least implicitly the new rules, the result is a puzzle.

If a cure of such a puzzle is to be achieved, it is first of all necessary to straighten out the logic of the case so that it may be possible to alleviate the intractibility of such questions as "Do Universals exists?" The result of the analysis will be a statement or set of statements in the form "Such-and-such a type of expressions is used in such-and-such a way," which then may provide an answer to the initial puzzle. An example from the history of philosophy might be: "'Exists' should be used only of descriptions."

Here it is entirely proper to ask, "Who says so? Who says this expression is to be used only in this way?" Unwilling as the philosopher now is or should be to answer, "Reason says so," or "God says so," it seems that he must answer, "I, the analyzing philosopher, say so." But then the assertion must lack some authority. It can then only be a proposal, a proposal for a set of rules for the use of the expression. Moreover, these proposed rules stipulate a usage somehow different from the one in fact current in a group of people. Otherwise, no clarification would result from adopting them.

Why make such proposals? Obviously the proposed rule or rules must be intended to be an improvement over those empirically found in use. Furthermore, the proposed improvements of language are not in these cases trivialities of vocabulary. They are alterations of the logic, that is of the structure, of language. And to make such an alteration is no small matter, for the structure of our language is the structure of our apprehension of reality. To propose an amendment to its logic is to say in effect, "Come, let us look at the world differently than we have been accustomed to do." The decision to accept or reject a philosophical analysis is in the life of the decider a move of the kind that used to be accomplished as an advance in metaphysical discovery. Thus the endless task of analysis has the same place in the life of the analyzer as the equally endless task of working out a metaphysical system has in the life of the metaphysician: it is the articulation of his search for meaning.

There is then no convincing reason to sweep the charge under the rug. Even though one may not wish to eliminate God-talk from language altogether, it must be admitted that utterances containing the word "God" do create problems and stand in need of analysis. Such analysis has, with increasing intensity, been attempted. Those engaged in this task tended to be philosophers, and moreover, philosophers with some bias against belief in God. Consequently the findings seemed to indicate that God-talk is in logical disorder and cannot be put in order without ceasing to be theological.

A good compendium of these negative views is C.B. Martin's book Religious Belief. He finds that logical disorder is inherent in religious language. Scientific language, moral language, etc., are not, he points out, typically in logical disorder themselves. We usually find logical knots only in the products of reflection about these languages. Thus in everyday life people handle "good" and "evil" easily and efficiently. They get into trouble only when they begin to ask, "But what is good?", that is, "What does 'good' mean?" Not so with theology. Like speculative metaphysics it is possible only by lawless use of language, and so is inherently nonsensical. People do not handle "God" well at any level.

> The method of theology is that of giving a description that seems to have a perfectly straightforward meaning and then denying that it has that meaning without giving instruction as to what sort of meaning it has.[6]

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[6] C.B. Martin, Religious Belief (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 5.

In speaking about God we use expressions that in ordinary discourse are governed by certain rules; we deny that these apply here, and we provide no substitutes: God is my father - but this does not mean that he has begotten me or that he in all cases behaves in the way fathers of my acquaintance would. But what then does "God is my father" mean?

In the earlier and positivistic period the challenge took the form of applying to theological utterances the verifiability criterion of meaning. The logical positivists were mainly concerned with the workings of descriptive language, i.e. language used to describe states of affairs, to seek, record, and communicate information. In other words, they were interested in the logic of the sciences. They asked the questions: How can we tell when an utterance is of this descriptive sort? How can we recognize a genuinely scientific statement? And they proposed the answer: A sentence is descriptive when it either is itself verifiable by observation or is logically so constituted that from it, together with the whole system of otherwise accepted propositions, there can be deduced propositions that are so directly verifiable and could not otherwise have been deduced. Whatever problems may be found with this criterion,[5] it does make a rough distinction between science and pseudo-science.

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[5] A discussion of this issue will follow in the second chapter.

Applying this criterion to statements about God, it becomes apparent at once that there is something odd. "God" is by definition the name of a transcendent entity, that is, one unobservable in any normal sense of "observable." In itself this is not necessarily fatal. Poetry, moral exhortations, and a great many vital uses of language consist of unverifiable utterances. This only means that they are other-than-scientific uses of language. But theological utterances intend to state facts, the fact for example that God is loving. Yet, suggested logical positivists, they fail to do so because they are cognitively vacuous and thus pseudo-assertions.

Later analysts, led by Wittgenstein, became aware that there are many language acts besides describing, that there are many games with words besides the one played by scientists. They found the positivists catch-all category of other-than-descriptive[6] entirely too undifferentiated. Austin's analysis of such statements as "I do thee wed" or "You are hereby notified. . ." as "performative" utterances is a paradigm case.[7] He isolated in the present active indicative a whole group of sentences that are not verifiable, yet are none the worse for it, as they do not merely describe a state but create it.

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[6] This is what I think the term "emotive" amounts to.

[7] J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 222 ff.

The questions now directed at God-talk were: What language activity or activities are being pursued here? What are the rules of these games? Is there a consistent set or sets? One specific question is: Is a cognitive language, which is to be used in learning and informing, also being used here? Or will God-talk and religious language based on it have to be understood as, to take one possibility, purely performative, and our actual use be reformed to avoid the false and bewitching appearance of making statements?

This development had a hopeful aspect. But those who have actually attempted such analysis have often suggested that theological language is no better off when the matter is put this way than it was under the earlier challenge. They have looked, writes Crombie, for "the rules which Christians appear to lay down for the interpretation of theological statements," and have been led to hold "that these rules conflict with each other in such a way that no meaningful statements could possibly be governed by such rules."[8] Or they have saved theology by drastic reinterpretations unacceptable to the actual users of this language.[9]

At this point it might be useful to spell out the details of the challenge in the form of a list of some of the most frequently discovered difficulties in the logical workings of theological language. It may be kept in mind that the issue is not whether any particular statements containing the word "God" are true, but whether such statements can mean what believers want them to mean. Thus one cannot escape by reference to "taking on faith" or to the "illumination of the Spirit." "To say that it is to be believed on faith and not by reason, does not face the difficulty: for the question was not how it should be believed, but what was to be believed."[10] And if the Spirit interprets, then he does so either to me alone or by providing the public key to decoding the expressions in question. If to me alone, then the expressions are not interpreted as language; if publicly, it is irrelevant who gives the keys so long as they are available.[11]

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[8] I.M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements," *Faith and Logic*, ed. Basil Mitchell, p. 33. It must be noted that this is not Crombie's view.

[9] For example see: Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*.

Most criticisms begin with the observation that believers do not treat their statements about God as hypotheses, that is as opinions held pending further confirmation or disconfirmation. They do not say, "God is love - perhaps." Yet they insist that their statements are informative. The allegedly anomalous character of this situation can be put in two ways. (1) If a theological assertion such as "God is love" is not a hypothesis, that is, if it cannot be refuted by objections like "But what about the sufferings of the innocent?", then it does not function by delineating one range of possible situations in which it is true as against another range of possible situations in which it is false. It is held to be true no matter what situation obtains. But now if no possible situations in the world could fall outside the range of those evoked by "God is love," how does this sentence say anything about what situations in fact obtain or do not obtain? What more does one believe about the way things are if one affirms this sentence than one would have believed had one denied it? And how are we ever to specify what "love" means? Normally we would go about this by ruling: If anyone does such-and-such, he loves; if he does such-and-such, he does not love. But here believers insist "God is love" is true no matter what situation obtains.[12] (2) We give rules for the peculiar predicates we feel proper to use with "God" - such as "perfectly . . ." or "infinitely. . ." - so that their meaning is defined by "God." Thus "perfectly good" means of course simply "good the way God is good." But then "God is perfectly good" simply means "God is good in the way God is good," which is necessarily true but entirely uninformative. Or putting the problem more precisely, "God" may be a name, in which case "God is good" is, like "John is good" a hypothesis and so possibly false. Or "God" may be a place-marker for a description: "the perfectly good, perfectly wise being." In this case "God is good" means "The perfectly good being is good," which is again necessarily true, yet informationally vacuous. However, so goes the accusation, theology wants it both ways at once: it wants "God is love" to be both informative and irrefutable; it wants to use "God" with some characteristics of a name and some of a description. And thus arises the inherent logical confusion in the word "God."[13]

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[10] Bernard Williams, "Tertullian's Paradox," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and MacIntyre, p. 211.

[11] See also: Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Logical Status of Religious Belief," *Metaphysical Beliefs*, pp. 165-169.

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[12] Cf. the discussion of "Theology and Falsification" in Flew and MacIntyre, New Essays in Philosophical Theology.

Other problems grow out of the notion, evidently inseparable from the word "God," that the reality so named is ontologically different from all other reality; that is, that God is what he is in a different way than creatures are what they are.

(1) One side of this is that although "God" appears to be used as a subject-word, it is not used as ordinary subject-words are used. Their use is based fundamentally on acquaintance. If I say, "Bill is clever," and you ask, "Who is Bill?", I will respond "Him" and point; or if this is not practicable, I will say, "The man who married the Brown daughter." This then simply moves the

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[13] Cf. C.B. Martin, op. cit., pp. 35-44, 56f., 62f. Cf. also J.N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?", New Essays in Philosophical Theology.

pointing operation one step back. Now I must point to the Brown girl. It does not seem that we can point to God. Therefore it is not too outrageous to conclude that "God" is logically different from "Bill." Now there are of course subject-words that display precisely this same logical peculiarity. One example is the construct "the average man." I will never become acquainted with him either, yet find no difficulty in talking of him. But this parallel is of little help. When the believer says "God is loving" he wants it to be more like "Bill is loving" than like "The average man is loving." It seems that here again we have a case of wanting it both ways at once.[14]

(2) Since God is the Creator, all relational statements about God relate him not to some particular reality, but to the whole of it. This causes difficulty, it is alleged, for statements about the universe are tricky. "Universe" does not mean a thing; it means the class of all things. It is not a thing-word. Now when we speak of "holding up" a chair, we know exactly what we mean. But since the universe is not a thing, it is hard to see how "hold up" can be used meaningfully with it. "So-and-so upholds the universe" is perilously close to "fishing smells." But how are we to speak of God at all without such expressions?[15]

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[14] C.B. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[15] Cf. Ronald Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (New York: Pegasus, 1958), pp. 167-170.

The challenge is quite formidable. Yet I remain, at least at this point, unconvinced. If this seems not sharing the contemporary outlook,[16] I can only regret that. If those who continue to search after God are now by a new turn of conventional wisdom the bearers of the tradition of dissent, so be it.

In this study I would like to argue the following points: (1) that the verification criterion of meaning has not succeeded in showing the meaninglessness of God-talk; (2) that meaningful but nonassertive interpretations of God-talk, while having shown interesting dimensions of theological language, cannot claim to be adequate accounts; (3) that some God-talk intends to be assertive, that it intends to refer to some state of affairs, the possibility of which needs to be explored.

Out of this proposal follows the outline for this paper. In the second chapter I wish to discuss the development and limitations of the verification principle. The third chapter is given to a review and evaluation of some of the more prominent nonassertive interpretations. The main thesis, i.e. that at least some utterances containing the word "God" are to be taken as assertive, will be presented in the fourth chapter. Special attention will be given to Wittgenstein's concept of "seeing as" and the work of John Wisdom.

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[16] Cf. J.N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 54.

CHAPTER II

THE VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE

I. STATEMENTS OF THE VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE

The verification principle, formulated by thinkers who were either associated with the Vienna Circle or the movement known as Logical Positivism, has led contemporary philosophers to question the status of God-talk.

It ought to be mentioned at this point that it is somewhat misleading to speak of "the verification principle" or "the empiricist criterion of meaning." There have been many different formulations designed to distinguish empirical from non-empirical (or, as some insisted, meaningful from meaningless) statements. Even among members of the two movements there was a great deal of disagreement as to what constitutes a satisfactory formulation.

For example, Schlick demanded that a statement, in order to be meaningful, must be conclusively verifiable. He distinguished between two classes of statements. Analytic statements are those in which the predicate of the statement is contained in the subject. Such statements are tautologies; their truth is independent of every possible experience; they "express no facts, and teach us nothing about what exists in the world, or how anything does or should behave in the world."[17] The verification principle is designed to deal not with this kind of statement, but rather with synthetic or empirical statements in which the predicate is not contained in the subject, i.e., statements which purport to give some factual information. It specifies that a meaningful synthetic statement is one whose truth can be conclusively verified, that is, its truth or falsity is capable of being finally and publicly decided. A statement whose truth or falsity cannot be conclusively decided is not to be considered as a meaningful synthetic statement, but rather constitutes a pseudo-statement. Wrote Schlick, "a genuine statement must be capable of conclusive verification."[18]

Ayer and Carnap were quick to realize that conclusive verification was far too stringent a demand. If it was accepted, many statements which could not possibly considered to be meaningless, would fall to the wayside as pseudo-statements. For example, Ayer pointed out that statements such as "a body tends to expand when heated" or "arsenic is poisonous" are meant to apply to an infinite number of cases. No finite series of verifications could ever establish them conclusively once and for all.[19] Schlick recognized the problem, but stuck to his view. He maintained that such general statements were not genuine statements at all, but represented only prescriptions for the formation of statements.[20] They are nonsensical statements, however important nonsensical statements. For Ayer this amounted to a recognition of a rather disturbing paradox without in any way removing it.[21]

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[17] Moritz Schlick, *Problems of Ethics*. Translated by D. Rynin, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939), p. 109.

[18] Moritz Schlick, "Die Kausalitaet in der gegenwaertigen Physik," *Die Naturwissenschaften*, Vol. XIX (1931), p. 150.

As a result Ayer proposed a weaker method of verification which was also accepted by Carnap. The distinction between tautological (or analytic) and empirical (or synthetic) statements is maintained. Since a tautological statement is one whose "validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains,"[22] it has no factual content whatever and one need not resort to any experience whatever in order to discover whether or not it is true.

Empirical propositions, on the other hand, depend for their truth on the facts of experience. Understanding the meaning of the individual terms involved in such a proposition does not indicate whether it is true or false. For purposes of deciding the truth or falsity of synthetic statements one must rely on experience, i.e. one must observe whether or not the state of affairs represented by the statement exists in fact.[23]

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[19] Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, (2nd. ed.), (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., undated), p. 37.

[20] Moritz Schlick, *op. cit.*, p. 151

[21] Alfred J. Ayer, *op. cit.*, p. 37. [22] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

This amounts to a rejection of any knowledge which claims to be about reality transcending the world of experience. Men must begin with evidence gained from sense experience. No valid reasoning process can ever, from such premisses, lead one to a conception of transcendent reality. "From empirical premisses nothing whatsoever concerning. . . anything super-empirical can legitimately be inferred."[24] Should someone suggest, however, that knowledge of some transcendent reality was derived not from sense experience, but rather from some faculty of intellectual intuition which enabled one to know facts which could not be known through sense experience, Ayer replies that no statement made about such a reality can have any literal significance whatever. It is, in other words, nonsense.[25] Now there are, in fact, many synthetic statements which do not give us any information about experience, even though they may appear to do so. What is needed then is some principle or criterion which would serve to distinguish between synthetic statements which convey empirical information and those which only appear to convey such information but do not do so.

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[23] Rudolf Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics and Formalization of Logic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 141.

[24] Ayer, *Language*, p. 33. [25] *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

A synthetic statement is factually significant to any given person, writes Ayer, if and only if he knows how to verify the proposition which it expresses, that is, if there are certain observations which would lead to the acceptance of the proposition as true or rejection of it as false. A synthetic statement is not factually significant if the assumption of its truth or falsehood is compatible or consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning future experience. Such a statement is devoid of any factual content and is a pseudo-proposition. For example, "The Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of evolution and progress,"[26] is in Ayer's opinion a pseudo-proposition since one could not even conceive of an observation which would enable one to decide whether or not the Absolute did enter into evolution and progress.[27]

It may be possible to have "attendant images and thoughts" with any synthetic proposition. These, however, do not make the proposition meaningful. What does that is the possibility of deducing from it some prediction of future experience.[28]

In order to understand fully the nature of this meaning-criterion, certain points must be examined. Carnap

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[26] Ibid., p. 36. Ayer indicates that he has taken this "at random" from F.H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*.

[27] Ibid., p. 36.

[28] Rudolf Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1935), p. 14.

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distinguishes between two kinds of verification, direct and indirect. A proposition is said to be directly verifiable if it asserts something about a present perception, e.g., "I see a red square on a blue ground." The truth or falsity of such a proposition can be determined by present, direct experience. On the other hand, there are certain propositions which cannot be verified in this manner. As an example Carnap suggests, "This key is made of iron." Such a proposition, though verifiable, is only indirectly so. It can only be verified if, together with either an analytic proposition or another already verified proposition, it leads to some other proposition which can be directly verified.[29]

A further distinction is drawn between practical verifiability and verifiability in principle. A proposition is said to be verifiable in practice if either itself or some proposition derived from it can be actually and directly verified. A proposition can, however, be unverifiable in practice but verifiable in principle, e.g., "There are mountains on Pluto." Such a proposition cannot, at present, be verified in practice either directly or indirectly. But it is nevertheless possible to know what observations would serve to show the truth or falsity of such a statement were one in a position to make such observations. Such a proposition, even though not verifiable in practice, is nevertheless significant or meaningful.[30]

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[29] Ibid., pp. 10-13.

Another point must be mentioned here. Ayer maintained in the first edition of his book that only tautological statements are certain. Genuine empirical or synthetic statements are one and all hypotheses, i.e., statements which are in some way predictive of future experience and which can be confirmed or discredited by future experience. They are not absolutely certain, but always subject to the test of future experience.[31]

In the second edition Ayer asserts that there is a certain class of synthetic propositions which can be verified conclusively and so can be counted absolutely certain. These are basic propositions which refer "solely to the content of a single experience," and which are conclusively verified by the experience to which they refer.[32] But Ayer insists that such basic propositions, since they merely record one's present experience, convey no information either to oneself or to another person. Sometimes, however, the form of the words used to express such a proposition may be understood to express some information. But then the proposition is no longer basic. Thus the vast majority of empirical statements are not, in fact, basic propositions nor deducible from any finite set of basic propositions. They are, therefore, never conclusively verified, and can never be absolutely certain. Carnap also writes that in the verification of a proposition we may, after investigation of sufficient instances, begin to accept the certainty of the proposition. But for any single proposition there is the possibility of an infinite number of instances, and it is always possible to find, in the future, some negative instances. Thus, a proposition of this type "can never be completely verified. For this reason it is called an hypotheses."[33]

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[30] Ayer, *Language*, p. 36. Ayer's example is "There are mountains on the farther side of the moon." I changed the example to preserve the point of the argument.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94. [32] *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

In the development and discussion of the verification principle by Ayer and Carnap, reference is frequently made to "future experience" in connection with empirical statements or hypotheses. Some attention must be given to this connection.

In the eyes of Logical Positivists the purpose in formulating hypotheses is to anticipate the course of sensations. "The function of a system of hypotheses is to warn us beforehand what will be our experience in a certain field—to enable us to make accurate predictions."[34] Hypotheses are consequently described as "rules which govern our expectation of future experience."[35] An empirical proposition or hypothesis is tested by seeing whether or not it fulfills the function which it is designed to fulfill. Anticipation of experience is the criterion which, in the last analysis, determines whether or not an empirical proposition is meaningful.

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[33] Carnap, Philosophy, pp. 12-13.

[34] Ayer, Language, p. 97. [35] Ibid., p. 97.

The verification principle, as formulated by Ayer and Carnap, thus attempts to distinguish, within synthetic statements, two basic types: (1) those which are predictive of future experience, and which can be verified or confuted by future experience; such synthetic statements are meaningful; (2) those which do not predict any future experience, and which cannot, in principle, be either verified or confuted by future experience; such statements are meaningless.

If such a criterion is accepted, it follows, Ayer claims, that much of what has been traditionally termed metaphysics is to be rejected as meaningless.[36]

Carnap calls "metaphysical" any proposition which claims to represent knowledge about something over and above all experience.[37] Metaphysicians, he continues, cannot help but make their propositions non-verifiable. Were they verifiable, experience would be relevant to their truth or falsity and such propositions would then belong to the domain of one of the empirical sciences. But since metaphysics pretends to teach knowledge higher than that of the empirical sciences, metaphysicians are compelled to cut all connections between their propositions and experience. This procedure deprives metaphysical propositions of any sense.[38]

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[36] The first chapter of *Language, Truth and Logic* is entitled "The Elimination of Metaphysics." It ends with the sentence "What is important to us is to realise that even the utterances of the metaphysician who is attempting to expound a vision are literally senseless; so that henceforth we may pursue our philosophical researches with as little regard for them as for the more inglorious kind of metaphysics which comes from a failure to understand the workings of our language." (p. 45)

[37] Carnap, *Philosophy*, p. 15.

However, as Ayer is quick to point out, one may find certain genuine propositions in the writings of thinkers who are normally called metaphysicians. But on analysis such propositions will be found to belong to one of the empirical sciences, or to be tautological statements, or valuable discussions of the meanings of terms and the uses of language. Strictly speaking, in Ayer's terms, a metaphysical utterance is one which is non-tautological but which does not meet the standards for meaningfulness as delineated in the verification principle.[39] It is also true that there are many metaphysical passages which are the work of "genuine mystical feeling." These may have a moral or aesthetic value and have a very strong effect on the reader. Thus they may be said to express something. Although this may be so, they are nonetheless literally senseless and lacking in theoretical content.[40]

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[38] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[39] Ayer, Language, p. 41. In Ayer's terminology (p. 8) any grammatically significant form of words is a sentence; any indicative sentence, whether or not it is meaningful, expresses a statement. The term "proposition" is reserved for a meaningful statement.

In order to show that such metaphysical passages may very well express something but still be literally senseless, Carnap distinguishes between two functions of language; an expressive and a representative function.

> Almost all the conscious and unconscious movements of a person, including his linguistic utterances, express something of his feelings, his present mood, . . . and the like. Therefore we may take almost all his movements and words as symptoms from which we can infer something about his feelings or his character. That is the expressive function of movements and words.[41]

But in addition to this function, certain linguistic utterances represent a state of affairs; "they tell us that something is so and so; they assert something, they predicate something, they judge something."[42] Both these functions of language are expressive; but the second function is in addition representative. A statement may thus have an expressive but non-representative function. Such a statement would be literally meaningless. Metaphysical passages which may have moral and aesthetic value fall within this category of expressive, but non-representative, meaningless language.[43]

It is obvious that in the view of Ayer and Carnap the exclusion of metaphysics from the category of the meaningful applies as well to all religious knowledge.[44] Ayer nevertheless formally considers the possibility of meaningful religious statements. It is important, he writes, to note that the existence of a being with the attributes usually considered to belong to God can never be conclusively proved. To show that the statement "God exists" is demonstratively certain, it must be deduced from premisses which are themselves demonstratively certain. Except for basic propositions from which nothing about God follows, no empirical proposition is ever absolutely certain. Nor can the existence of God be deduced from tautological propositions, for "from a set of tautologies nothing but a further tautology can be validly deduced."[45]

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 45. [41] Carnap, *Philosophy*, p. 27.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 29. Metaphysical utterances "are, like laughing, lyrics, and music, expressive. They express not so much temporary feelings as permanent emotional or volitional dispositions."

Nor is it possible to prove that the existence of God is even probable. For if the statement "God exists" is probable, then it is an empirical proposition. If it were such, then one could deduce from it certain experiential propositions, i.e., propositions predicting some future experience. But this is not possible. It is sometimes claimed, Ayer notes, that regularity in nature constitutes sufficient evidence for the existence of God. However, if the statement "God exists" entails in meaning no more than that certain sequential phenomena occur in nature, then to say "God exists" would be equivalent to asserting that there is regularity in nature. But no religious person would accept this. In point of fact, God is usually described as a transcendent being who could be known in terms of certain empirical manifestations but could not be defined in terms of these manifestations. This only shows, Ayer comments, that the term "God" is metaphysical. To say "God exists" is to make a metaphysical utterance which is neither true nor false, but meaningless. Hence, the statement "God exists" cannot be admitted as even probable. On the same grounds, Ayer concludes, "no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance."[46]

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[44] Religious knowledge seems, at least in Ayer, to be identical with knowledge about God. Cf. his discussion in Language, Truth and Logic, pp. 114-117.

[45] Ayer, Language, pp. 114-115.

Ayer's position is thus different from the views maintained by atheists and agnostics. The atheist holds that it is at least probable that no God exists. The agnostic maintains that the existence of God is a possibility which cannot be proved or disproved. Ayer's view is incompatible with both of these positions, for they at least implicitly accept the meaningfulness of the statements "God exists" and "God does not exist." And now one cannot help but wonder whether Ayer had not proven too much.

II. THE VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE CRITIZED

Kraft, who was a member of the Vienna Circle himself, remained critical of the attempt to distinguish between scientific statements and metaphysical statements in terms of meaningfulness. He noted that "the definition of meaningfulness in terms of verifiability amounts to no sufficient criterion of distinction between meaningful and meaningless sentences."[47] In his opinion the issue of meaning deserves more attention.

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[46] Ibid., p. 115.

He suggested that a sign is meaningless only when nothing has been co-ordinated with it by stipulation. Since different rules may be stipulated for the same signs, a sentence which may be meaningless in one language may be meaningful in a language of a different semantic and syntactic construction. If in one language the syntactic rules forbid the application of psychological predicates to the class of inorganic entities, the statement "The sky is laughing" would be considered meaningless. If, however, a language is constructed which does not forbid this application, the sentence would be meaningful. Hence, if "laughing is allowed to designate, not a mental state alone, but also the power of causing a mental state, the sentence 'The sky is laughing' is meaningful."[48]

To judge whether or not a sentence is meaningful, one cannot consider it in isolation from the system of semantic and syntactic rules in which it is found. This to Kraft indicates a significant insight: one cannot distinguish scientific from metaphysical statements on the basis of meaning. Rather, since it is the semantic and syntactic rules governing a sentence which make it meaningful, it is possible to construct a semantic system in which even metaphysical statements are meaningful.[49]

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[47] Victor Kraft, The Vienna Circle, Translated by Arthur Pap, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), pp. 37-38.

[48] Ibid., p. 40.

The error of those proposing the verification principle as "the" criterion of meaning lies in the attempt to treat the separation of metaphysics and science on the grounds of meaning as a separation dictated by language in general. From all possible languages Logical Positivism selects but one language which satisfies the following rules: (1) reducibility of the meaning of descriptive signs to ostentation of what those signs designate in experience; and (2) empirical testability of a factual assertion, which means the ultimate possibility of pointing to experiential data. Granted a language which satisfies these rules, the propositions of transcendental metaphysics remain unverifiable and meaningless and are thus clearly distinguished from scientific assertions. But this empirical criterion does not result from the conditions of language in general; it is rather the criterion of only one special language, empiricism.[50]

Kraft's discussion is quite noteworthy. First of all, he rejects the distinction between scientific and metaphysical statements on the grounds of meaningfulness. He quotes with approval Popper's statement that behind the verification principle lies the definition of the concept "significant," a concept so narrowly defined that only the statements of empirical science are declared to be significant. Such a definition is "dogmatic" and "once this meaning-dogma has been elevated on the throne, it is forever beyond assault."[51] Meaning, for Kraft, depends on the structure of the language in which a given proposition functions; i.e., on the semantic and syntactic rules which govern the statement. Now the verification principle has shown that metaphysical statements do not fit the requirements of an empiricist language. But this is not to say that a metaphysical statement is meaningless. For "there exists more than one single language, there is a plurality of possible languages accordingly as we choose this or that set of semantic and syntactic rules."[52]

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[49] Ibid., pp. 40-41. [50] Ibid., p. 41.

The major thrust of Kraft's criticism is repeated by Popper. However, he presses the issue further by introducing a principle of falsifiability which would distinguish within the area of meaningful synthetic statements those which belong to a scientific system from those which belong to a metaphysical system.

"The dogma of meaning or sense," Popper writes,

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 37. [52] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

"and the pseudo-problems to which it has given rise, can be eliminated if we adopt, as our criterion of demarcation, the *criterion of falsifiability*."[53] Such a criterion is one of "unilateral or *one-sided* decidability."[54] According to the criterion, a statement or system of statements is empirical and conveys information about the empirical world only if it is capable of "clashing" with experience, i.e., if it can be systematically tested or subjected to tests which might result in its refutation. This criterion, claims Popper, suitably distinguishes an empirical system from a metaphysical one but it does not do so at the expense of calling all metaphysical statements meaningless. In accordance with this criterion, therefore, one may class or describe an empirical science as follows: "*In so far as a scientific statement speaks about reality, it must be falsifiable: and in so far as it is not falsifiable, it does not speak about reality.*"[55]

Such a criterion, as distinguished from the verifiability criterion, does not demand that, for a statement to be meaningful, it must be either an elementary, experiential statement or be derived from such statements. What it does demand is that a statement in order to be empirical must be able to be contradicted by experience.

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[53] Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Translated by the author with the assistance of Julius Freed and Lan Freed, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1959), p. 313.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 313. [55] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

A universal statement can never be logically derived from a singular statement or any finite set of singular statements. Thus the demand for conclusive verifiability fails. But a universal statement can be contradicted by a singular statement. We can proceed, not from the trugh of singulars to the truth of a universal statement, but rather from the truth of a singular statement to the falsity of a universal statement. Hence, according to the requirement of the principle of falsifiability a statement need not be "singled out, for once and for all, in a positive sense"; rather, its logical form should be such that it can be singled out in a negative sense.[56] To be considered as part of an empirical scientific system, a statement must be capable of being refuted by experience. The empirical content of a statement "will increase with its degree of falsifiability: the more a statement forbids, the more it says about the world of experience."[57]

The difference between Popper's principle of falsifiability and the verification principle must be noted. Falsifiability, for Popper, is a criterion of demarcation, not a criterion of meaning. By use of the criterion we can separate "two kinds of perfectly meaningful statements: the falsifiable and the non-falsifiable. It draws a line inside meaningful language, not around it."[58]

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[56] *Ibid.*, p. 41. [57] *Ibid.*, p. 119

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 40, footnote 3.

Popper is explicit on this point. "As to meaningless nonsense," he writes, "I do not pretend that my criterion is applicable to it."[59]

The possibly most important criticism of the verification principle came from Ludwig Wittgenstein. Although not a member of the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein corresponded with some of its members and came to exert considerable influence upon it. His early philosophy finds expression in his _Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus_ which he completed before he was thirty years old. The keynote appears in the preface:

> The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.[60]

Here we have the startling suggestion that the great problems which had taxed the mental powers of philosophers since Thales would vanish into thin air if the logic of our language is correctly understood.

There are two assumptions behind the method of the _Tractatus_: (1) The structure of language is revealed by logic. (2) The essential function of language is to describe or to depict the world. Thus Wittgenstein focuses his attention on the questions: What is the nature of logic? How is language related to the world? Logic, language and the world, these are the key issues of the book.

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[59] _Ibid._, p. 312.

[60] Ludwig Wittgenstein, _Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus_, Translated by C.K. Ogden, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), p. 3.

In Wittgenstein's view at this his "earlier" period "language" is identical with "descriptive language." To "say" anything is equivalent to "describing" something. Thus "the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science."[61] "What can be said" is identified with the "propositions of natural science."[62]

What about the propositions of logic, mathematics, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics and theology? Wittgenstein concludes that the propositions of those disciplines do not "say" anything. They are senseless or nonsensical because they are attempts to transcend, in language, the limits of language and, hence, the world.

As we saw, only that "can be said" which is capable of being true or false, and that has to be decided by "comparing the proposition with reality."[63] A proposition has sense in so far as it is a logical picture of the world. But no picture can be true a priori. "It is impossible to tell from the picture alone whether it is true or false."[64] The propositions of logic (mathematics) are true a priori, they are tautologies,[65] and their negations are contradictions. Thus "the propositions of logic say nothing,"[66] they are "senseless."[67] But they are not nonsensical, for they show "the formal-logical properties of language and the world,"[68] or the limit of language and the world.

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[61] _Ibid._, 4.11. [62] _Ibid._, 6.53. [63] _Ibid._, 2.223.
[64] _Ibid._, 2.224.

To sum up, according to the *Tractatus* all that can be said is *how* reality is, i.e., that certain atomic facts exist and that certain others do not. Nothing can be significantly said about *what* reality is.[69] But that is precisely what metaphysicians and theologians attempt to talk about. Religion, ethics, art, and the realm of the personal are all concerned with what cannot be said, that which transcends the world.

> The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists. . . . For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world. . . . It must lie outside the world.[70]

Wittgenstein considered ethics and aesthetics one and the same, they are both transcendental, and so is religion. "How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world."[71] Thus, concludes Wittgenstein, "there are, indeed, things that are inexpressible. They show themselves.

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[65] *Ibid.*, 611 [66] *Ibid.*, 6.11. [67] *Ibid.*, 4.461.
[68] *Ibid.*, 6.12. [69] *Ibid.*, 3.221. [70] *Ibid.*, 6.41
[71] *Ibid.*, 6.432.

They are what is mystical."[72]

Logical Positivists generally regarded the *Tractatus* as the crystallization of their own anti-metaphysical doctrines. They often saw Wittgenstein as an ally in the fight for the elimination of metaphysics and religion.[73] However, Wittgenstein does not fit the mold. There are indications which clearly show that he was far from ready to write metaphysics and religion off. Thus, for instance, Carnap reports,

> Once when Wittgenstein talked about religion, the contrast between his and Schlick's position became strikingly apparent. Both agreed of course in the view that the doctrines of religion in their various forms had no theoretical content. But Wittgenstein rejected Schlick's view that religion belonged to the childhood phase of humanity and would slowly disappear in the course of cultural development. When Schlick, on another occasion, made a critical remark about a metaphysical statement by a classical philosopher (I think it was Schopenhauer), Wittgenstein surprisingly turned against Schlick and defended the philosopher and his work.[74]

He appears to be defending metaphysics in a way similar to a theologian who, in view of the failures of the so-called proofs for the existence of God argues: it is not a question of proof at all - it is a matter of faith.[75] He is reported to have said in 1929-30,

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[72] *Ibid*., 6.522.

[73] Recent interpretations still insist on that point. Cf. G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 139; E. Stenius, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, p. 225.

[74] Rudolf Carnap, "Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, pp. 26-27.

> Man has the urge to thrust against the limits of language. Think for instance about one's astonishment that anything exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question and there is no answer to it. Anything we can say must, a priori, be only nonsense. Nevertheless we thrust against the limits of language. ..... But the tendency, the thrust, points to something. . . . I can only say: I don't belittle this human tendency; I take my hat off to it. . . . For me the facts are unimportant. But what men mean when they say that "The world is there" lies close to my heart.[76]

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein speaks of the "mystical,"[77] a conception despised by many of his positivist admirers. The texts are not easily understood and interpreted and do not offer too much encouragement to metaphysical theology. From the point of view of the *Tractatus* the only linguistic response to the mystical is silence. The description of the mystical is a job which is beyond the power of ordinary cognitive language. Thus, theologians could not rest too comfortably. Only more extreme forms of mysticism and types of fideism were compatible with the teaching of the *Tractatus*.

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[75] Mr. Malcolm relates: "He was impatient with 'proofs' of the existence of God, and with attempts to give religion a rational foundation. When I once quoted to him a remark of Kierkegaard's to this effect: 'How can it be that Christ does not exist, since I know that he has saved me?' Wittgenstein exclaimed: 'You see! It isn't a question of proving anything.'" (Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 71.)

[76] Friedrich Waismann, "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (January 1965).

[77] Cf. *Tractatus*, 6.522; 6.44; 6.4312; 6.432.

After the publication of the *Tractatus*, quite in keeping with his contention that all essential problems were solved, Wittgenstein abandoned philosophy to become an elementary-school teacher in an Austrian village. Fann suggests that these years of teaching may well be considered the most decisive factor in shaping his later philosophy. "The reality of teaching children how to read, write, calculate, etc., and the experience in compiling a dictionary for elementary schools must have contributed to Wittgenstein's later pragmatic view of language."[78]

This later work of Wittgenstein is to be found largely in the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*. Here he reveals a feeling of dissatisfaction with many of the key doctrines of the *Tractatus*. However, even though Wittgenstein became an uncompromising critic of his earlier work, it is important to note that his conception of the nature and task of philosophy remains the same. Philosophy is still a descriptive discipline: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is."[79]

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[78] K.T. Fann, *Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 43.

[79] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (2nd. ed.), Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 124.

Thus we do not find in the *Investigations* a rejection of the logic of analytic and empirically verifiable synthetic propositions as developed in the *Tractatus*. What is rejected is the view of the *Tractatus* that these two types are the *only* types of meaningful language. The later Wittgenstein disapproved of the programme of reductive analysis in the *Tractatus*, suggesting that there was an immense multiplicity of language games including those of mathematics and physics. Thus, while he did not soften the demand for veridical procedures with regard to factual assertions, he was prepared to recognize the significance and meaning of other language games.

Another connecting link between the two main works is Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as a therapeutic and anxiety-alleviating discipline. Philosophy, as seen in the *Investigations*, "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."[80] "The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head against the limits of language."[81] Philosophy thus alleviates our anxiety: "What is your aim in philosophy? - To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[82] How is this to be done? Wittgenstein counsels, "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[83]

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[80] *Ibid.*, 119. Cf. *Tractatus*, 6.52; 6.521.

[81] *Ibid.*, 419. [82] *Ibid.*, 309.

> When philosophers use a word - "knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name" - and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?"[84]

The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, however, does expound the novel doctrine that language is very much more complex than the *Tractatus* had suggested. He speaks of it as a group of varied language-game which share family resemblances. In order to find our way around these language-games we must think of words, not as the names of empirically identifiable objects, but as tools.[85] And the only way of understanding and differentiating between tools is to inquire for their use. He comments on the "multiplicity of language-games" in entry 23 as follows:

> It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.)[86]

Each use of language can only be explored in its context, which includes acting as well as speaking: "I shall . . . call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language-game'."[87] In Wittgenstein's later thought the meaning of a word is not something that can be understood independently of its use; rather its meaning is its use. He illustrates his point from chess: the meaning of words like "pawn" or "king" can only be learned by seeing how they are used in a specific game, and this is true of words of language-games other than chess.

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[83] *Ibid.*, 116. [84] *Ibid.*, 116. [85] *Ibid.*, 11.

[86] *Ibid.*, 23.

[87] *Ibid.*, 7; cf. 23: ". . . the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life."

With these criticisms in mind we may now appraise the programme of the logical positivists. Wittgenstein, at the end of the *Tractatus* had to take up the question of the meaning of the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself.[88] In its own terms they could only be declared to be senseless. Similarly, one may enquire about the status and meaning of key propositions in the programme of Logical Positivism. What sort of proposition, for instance, is the proposition which asserts that all propositions are either analytic or synthetic? If it is said to be analytic, then further affirmations regarding the meaning of synthetic propositions are to be accepted only as explications of a basic analytic statement. The statement is clearly not itself synthetic. Or, to pursue the matter further, what kind of statement is the statement that the meaning of synthetic propositions is equivalent to the mode of their verification? It is not synthetic; yet, if it is analytic, again we have merely a definitional utterance. Ayer himself, in the second edition of his *Language, Truth and Logic*, held this view. Yet, if the verification principle is "merely" definitional, can it have the scope and force which positivists wanted to claim for it?

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[88] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.54.

Some concluded that advocacy of the positivist classification and criterion of meaning constituted some kind of linguistic proposal. If it is taken to be more than a linguistic proposal, as somehow emerging from or demanded by "reality" itself, logical positivism would, in effect, be a form of metaphysics masquerading as linguistic analysis. This is what many critics of the movement have claimed to be the case. Positivists themselves would deny the validity of the charge, and, indeed, most of them have consistently sought to avoid statements which would give support to the criticism. Thus, Ayer would appear to accept the conclusions of his own classification in specifying the character of the warrant of the classification itself. Others would say that they are offering a linguistic convention. Such classification and advocacy are, however, not arbitrary. They are what follows from, and what is most faithful to, the actual structure and operation of scientific inquiry. If one looks to scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to knowledge of the world, then the definitions and proposals of the positivists are reasonable and fruitful.

This is, of course, a much more modest claim. The judgement that on the basis of the verification principle

God-language must be dismissed as meaningless, is now replaced by the demand that the theologian elucidate how he goes about justifying his statements if he wants to maintain the meaningfulness of sentences which do not fit the positivist classification. At this point the theologian might, following Wittgenstein's method, suggest that his task will be first of all to enquire how utterances about God are originally used in the language-game or form of life in which they had their origin. To treat them as straightforward scientific hypotheses can only lead to confusion.

However, the challenge of logical positivism, even in the more modest form, is still quite formidable. In an essay Schlick once wrote:

> The joy of cognition is the joy of verification, the triumphant feeling of having guessed correctly. And it is this that the observation statements bring about. In them science, as it were, achieves its goal: it is for their sake that it exists. . . . Finality is a very fitting word to characterize the function of observation statements. They are an absolute end. . . . Science does not rest upon them but leads to them, and they indicate that it has led correctly. They are really the absolutely fixed points; it gives us joy to reach them, even if we cannot stand upon them.[89]

Can the theologian articulate comparable ends? How does the God of whom he speaks relate to a world in which there can be the joy of cognition? If he claims to have cognition of God, is it similar to, in conflict with, or compatible with scientific cognition? This demand cannot be responsibly evaded.

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[89] Moritz Schlick, "The Foundations of Knowledge," in Logical Positivism, edited by Ayer, pp. 222-223.

CHAPTER III

THE NON-COGNITIVE ROUTE

Wittgenstein's work initiated a new phase in the investigation of religious language. Some of his remarks seemed to hint at new possibilities in metaphysical theology. If, it was argued, there is a multiplicity of language-games, each with its own form of life, then one ought to pay critical attention to the form of life from which a particular language-game originates. Self-confidence was further strengthened by Wittgenstein's insistence that philosophy was essentially a descriptive discipline which could not interfere with the actual use of language and would have to leave everything as it is. Here the lid was lifted off the narrow box of the older positivism. In another somewhat aphoristic remark Wittgenstein had defined theology as "grammar,"[90] which could be construed to be an invitation to theologians to elucidate the logic and rules underlying their particular language-game. No longer was it legitimate to dismiss God-talk as meaningless simply because its propositions were not of the same logical type as those of mathematics or physics.

However, before we hail Wittgenstein as the great liberator from the chains of positivism, it is only fair to recognise that the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* did not reject the logic of analytic and synthetic propositions as developed in the *Tractatus*.[91] What was rejected was the contention of the *Tractatus* that analytic and synthetic propositions are the only two types of significant language. But the demand for veridical procedures with regard to factual assertions remained in force. Theologians who wished to defend the claim that theological propositions were cognitive were thus cautioned to proceed with great care. The onus was still upon them to demonstrate rather carefully in what sense their propositions were cognitive and to show in what way the logic of God-talk related to the logic of other propositions making truth-claims.[92]

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[90] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, 373.

It was A.G.N. Flew who reminded theologians that the verification demand was still in force. In his now almost classical formulation of the issue[93] he developed a parable constructed by John Wisdom and employed in the latter's famous essay "Gods."[9b] In Flew's version, two explorers come upon a clearing in a jungle, where they find a few flowers growing among the weeds. One explorer, observing this, concludes that a gardener must have been cultivating the flowers. However, the other replies that this is an unlikely hypothesis in view of the paucity of the flowers in comparison with the weeds. And most important, he notes that no gardener is seen or heard. There is no direct verification of the gardener's existence. For the theist-explorer, however, the flowers continue to be evidence of the existence of the gardener. He calls attention to all the details of that evidence. The other explorer, nevertheless, remains unconvinced. The counterevidence is at least equally impressive. To test the possibility that the gardener might be real but invisible, bloodhounds are employed. An electrical fence is set up. But no cries are heard, no alarm is triggered. At last the skeptical explorer raises the crucial question: How would an invisible, inaudible, incorporeal, and otherwise imperceptible gardener differ from a purely imaginary gardener or from no gardener at all? Or in more technical language, what kind of existence of what kind of entity is being asserted when it is asserted that God exists, but that there is no sensory evidence of his existence? When the theist-explorer is pressed to say what kind of being the gardener is, he is forced to withdraw one after another of the usual characteristics of existing beings. The statement therefore, concludes Flew, seems to die a "death by a thousand qualifications."

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[91] Wittgenstein himself used to say that the *Tractatus* was not all wrong: it was not like a bag of junk professing to be a clock, but like a clock that did not tell you the right time. (G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, p. 78).

[92] J.A. Martin Jr. observes quite correctly, I think, that theologians cannot simply proceed to justify their language on the grounds that it is all part of a "theological language game" which one can only evaluate in terms of internal consistency or obedience to self-generated rules. " . . . They must be reminded that there is a continuing obligation to say where there is congruence with other games, and on what grounds and at what points they would claim autonomy." (*The New Dialogue Between Philosophy and Theology*, p. 110.)

[93] Cf. the discussion of "Theology and Falsification" in Flew and MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*.

[9b] Wisdom's formulation is to be considered at a later point.

In view of this formidable challenge it is not altogether surprising that a number of scholars exploring the logic of religious language completely abandoned the position that the purpose of religious language is to make factual truth claims. Conceding the inability of theological discourse to compete with science as an experimental and empirical language, they attempted to single out one or more non-cognitive functions of language as the "real" logic of theological language. The logic of theological speech, it was argued, can find its justification in doing a different job from that of the logic of the sciences. As J.B. Coates put it, "There are other positive uses of a belief in God which satisfy deeply felt needs to-day and do not seem to those who find benefit from them to express anything superstitious or unreasonable."[95]

According to Frederick Ferre,[96] these attempts can be roughly divided into two categories: there are analyses which try to understand the logic of religious language exhaustively in terms of functions which language may serve outside a strictly religious context, and there are analyses which endeavor to show that religious language has a unique function in addition to or instead of the non-religious usages. As one account after another was put forth, it became quite evident that, while each succeeded in illuminating one or more facets of religious language, it failed insofar as it claimed to have shown the "real" logic of religious language. There is also, and that is not really that much of a surprise, a multiplicity of religious language-games. In the following pages I intend to discuss some of the more important analyses in order to show both their merits and shortcomings.

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[95] J.B. Coates, "God and the Positivists," *The Hibbert Journal*, L (1952), p. 227.

[96] Frederick Ferre, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), Ch. 10 & 11.

I. SACRIFICIAL REVISIONS

Under this heading I want to take a look at analyses which deny a unique function to religious language in general and God-talk specifically.

God-talk as Existential Affirmation

One of the first attempts in that direction was made by D.M. McKinnon in an essay entitled "Death,"[97] even though his conclusions are strictly speaking only in reference to religious claims about an afterlife. He suggests that such claims are more fruitfully examined in terms of the existential discontent which gives rise to this language rather than in terms of an alleged descriptive content. As McKinnon admits, the traditional arguments for an afterlife "have gained plausibility from a refusal to attend to the logic of our language."[98] But even though one can question every stage in the fabric of traditional arguments and put glaring holes into it, one would be ill-advised to dismiss such language just on such grounds.

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[97] *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 261ff.

> To put it very crudely, just what is it that is at stake for a person in this matter of immortality? What is it that is bothering him? Of course, you can show queerness, the confusedness of the way in which the bother is expressing itself. . . . You can discredit this means of expression by showing the logical confusions into which it plunges: but does that settle the perplexity, the issue in the mind of the bewildered person?[99]

Religious talk about immortality is not correctly understood as an attempt to gain knowledge of fact without the discipline of experiment and critical reflection. Rather, it is at bottom the refusal to "allow that the clinician has said or can say all that is to be significantly said about death."[100] It is, in other words, man's confident or desperate affirmation that he matters.[101]

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[98] *Ibid.*, p. 262. [99] *Ibid.*, p. 263. [100] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

[101] A similar tack is taken by Leon when he argues that sentences like "God made the world" do not function like "Wren made St. Paul's." Such theological expressions are "not logical but existential, revelational, or inspirational; . . . they do not refer to God as cause or agent; and . . . they do not connect with him any particular item of reality except as an inseparable element in the worshipper's life and as the focus of inspiration." Philip Leon, "The Meaning of Religious Propositions," *The Hibbert Journal*, LIII (1954-55), pp. 151-56.

I do not want to deny that God-talk occasionally does function as described by McKinnon or Leon. In worship services and political rallies there is a lot of inspirational talk. And no doubt, for some people that is the main benefit derived from attendance: a strange but stirring arousal of the glands. But hopefully for at least some people this existential usage is very much tied up with the content of the statements. For reasonable people statements can only function as existential affirmations if they are accepted (rightly or wrongly) as true. Thus for example a more reflective Christian would find a significant difference between the existential affirmations of a man like Jean-Paul Sartre and Karl Barth.

God-talk as Conative Speech

R.B. Braithwaite in an influential essay entitled *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* suggested that religious assertions are primarily related to moral assertions and that their utterance is a statement of allegiance to moral policy.[102] Now Braithwaite is not content, as was Ayer, to reduce ethical discourse to the mere expressing of emotional approval or disapproval. While such a view may account for the empirical unverifiability of ethical language, it ignores the most significant aspect of moral utterances: they function as an expression of an intention to act in certain ways under certain circumstances. Moral discourse is conative rather than purely emotive.

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[102] R.B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 11.

If believers were uneasy about interpretations of their language which equated it with moral discourse as being merely emotive, they may relax now, for religious assertions treated in the conative way as declarations of commitment to a way of life support the theist's constant insistence that doctrine must spring from and encourage the life of the believer's community.[103]

The meaning and, in an important sense, the validity of God-talk may be tested by observation of the life that in fact accompanies the affirmation. Therefore, "the intention of a Christian to follow a Christian way of life is not only the criterion for the sincerity of his belief in the assertions of Christianity; it is the criterion of the meaningfulness of his assertions."[104] This is not to say that religious assertions are totally reducible to moral assertions. Any particular religious assertion entails a network of other assertions that constitute the total body of faith of a particular religious tradition. Furthermore, the conduct that is of concern to religion involves not only external but also internal behavior. In traditional terms, the "heart" as well as the "will" is involved. Conversion of the heart is indeed, as the emotivists saw, in part a matter of feeling. The deep-seated and profound change of attitude that it entails, however, is too complex and decisive to be exhaustively described in terms of feeling. It is the commitment to policy which accompanies the change of attitude that is the determinative constituent of religious orientation. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" - but "by their fruits ye shall know them."

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[104] R.B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, Excerpts printed in Santoni, *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 33.

According to Braithwaite, any single religious assertion entails a body of assertions associated with a specific religious tradition. This body of assertions, in turn, follows not from a set of propositions, but rather from a "story." There is a basic Christian story that expresses the Christian way of life just as there are basic Buddhist or Moslem stories expressing other ways of life. If the linguistic expression of the policy-assertion of a religion is omitted, the remaining pervasive attitude-commitment may be called religious belief. But religious belief is not belief in a proposition. It is an intention to behave in a certain way (a moral belief) together with the entertainment of certain stories associated with the intention in the mind of the believer.[105]

In making this analysis of the use of religious language Braithwaite has offered another justification for it. We are all painfully aware that ethical systems and principles are not easily fulfilled. If then religious language functions to support ethical theories by encouraging men to make commitments and stick with them, it is indeed a most important and legitimate form of speech. Braithwaite also hopes that his analysis has shown the importance of right religious language, in as much as great practical consequences spring from one's choice of ethical commitment.

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[105] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

Ronald Hepburn, whose position is to some extent a refinement of Braithwaite's view, recognizes that limitation of the purpose of God-talk to "fortifying of morality by parable" takes one outside traditional Christian belief.[106] But that is a sacrifice which Hepburn is willing to make in distinction to Braithwaite who thinks that traditional Christianity is compatible with his account of religious language in terms of "stories." Hepburn's position is more refined in that he defines more specifically what kind of ethical commitment is uniquely religious. Like Braithwaite he contends that

> . . . the believer commits himself to a pattern of ethical behavior. This way of life is simply decided for as an ultimate moral choice: empirical facts will be relevant to his choice, but he can derive his decision from no facts whatever, not even from commands of God, should he believe in a God.[107]

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[106] Ronald Hepburn, Christianity and Paradox (New York: Pegasus, 1958), pp. 193-194.

[107] Ibid., p. 195.

But whereas Braithwaite is content to speak vaguely of "stories" as supporting his commitment, Hepburn demands that such parables have both to be "tightly cohering" and to be of a type "that vividly expresses the way of life chosen" while it "inspires the believer to implement it in practice."[108] More important still, the parable must not be partial or trivial.

> The parable and its associated pattern of behavior legislate not for any fraction of the believer's life, but for every aspect of it. It commands his supreme loyalty and determines his total imaginative vision of nature and man.[109]

Hepburn claims that these criteria are sufficient for a definition of religion. He has not eliminated the possibility of fellowship in shared parables. Furthermore, he is not committed to a life of immortality on the one hand or to a view of the universe as hostile on the other. His understanding of religion permits growth and a sense of spiritual pilgrimage.

> In so far as a story or parable delineates a way of life that we judge to be valuable, it is not of paramount importance whether or not the story or parable is historically true. It can do its job equally well if fictitious; sometimes better.[110]

But now one wonders whether both Braithwaite and Hepburn have not seriously misunderstood the nature of belief. It appears that Ewing is quite correct when he points out that "emotion . . . requires some objective belief, true or false, about the real to support it for long."[111] Indeed, "it is difficult to see how they could long survive the thorough conviction that these . . . could not possibly be true."[112] C.H. Whitely makes the same point quite neatly when he writes:

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 195.   [109] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

> Let us suppose, what must sometimes be the case, that the whole benefit a neurotic derives from his visit to a psychiatrist arises from the fact that on the psychiatrist's couch, and nowhere else, he is able to relax and unburden his mind of its anxieties. Then it would be true that he would be equally benefited if the psychiatrist was an ignoramus, or was not listening, or even was not there at all. But it would not be true that he would be equally, or not at all benefited if he *believed* that the psychiatrist was an ignoramus, or not listening, or not there.[113]

Thus, while I do recognize that religious language has an important conative function, I cannot agree that it is the only valid function. It appears that the belief content of religious assertions is more significant than both Braithwaite and Hepburn are prepared to admit.

God-talk as Blik

R.M. Hare, in an essay entitled "Religion and Morals,"[114] undertakes to focus on the belief content of theological assertions. His attempt is motivated by the conviction that religious belief is more basic than scholars like McKinnon or Braithwaite were prepared to concede. The functions which were singled out by these thinkers arise out of religious belief; they do not constitute it.

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[111] A.C. Ewing, "Religious Assertions in the Light of Contemporary Philosophy," *Philosophy*, Vol. XXXII, No. 122 (July 1957), p. 207.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[113] C.H. Whitely, "The Cognitive Factor in Religious Experience," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. XXIX, 1965, p. 87.

[114] B. Mitchell (Ed.), *Faith and Logic* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), pp. 176ff.

Hare suggests that theological statements appear at one level of analysis to be straightforward assertions of fact. Thus the sentence "Jesus is the Son of God" has what seems like the status of factual belief in Christian practice. However, this sentence is not stating what we normally consider a fact at all. It is not equivalent to other factual assertions which could be made about Jesus, such as "Jesus was the son of Mary." Many of the disciples' contemporaries knew all the facts about Jesus. Yet, they refused to exclaim with Peter, "Thou art the Christ!" Alternative interpretations of all the facts were available to them. Son of God? He was a liar and an impostor. He performed miracles? He was an agent of Beelzebub.[115]

> If one person says "Jesus is Christ" and another denies this, they may not be differing about the facts; it may be that they have different attitudes to the facts. St. Paul, when this thing happened to him, changed his whole way of life; another person, if the same thing happened to him, might have said "Sign of overstrain! I've been driving myself too hard, persecuting these Christians; I must take a holiday and then I'll feel better." According to this view St. Peter, when he said "Thou art the Christ," was not stating a fact; he was doing something, namely worshipping.[116]

Here then, according to Hare, is the true function of theological discourse which marks it off from moral language on one hand and factual-scientific language on the other. "If we take religious language as a whole, it is too factual to be called specifically moral, and yet too closely bound up with our conduct to be called in the ordinary sense factual."[117] Here Hepburn's insight is underlined by Hare: that religion has to do with what is overwhelmingly important to a person. Thus he writes,

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[115] *Ibid.*, p. 184. [116] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

> The *facts* that religious discourse deals with are perfectly ordinary empirical facts like what happens when you pray; but we are tempted to call them supernatural facts because our whole way of living is organised around them; they have for us value, relevance, importance, which they would not have if we were atheists.[118]

Here the believer may get a bit restless over the suggestion that his assertion "Jesus is the Son of God" far from being a "fact" or even a "supernatural fact" is rather a logical blunder, namely that of failing to distinguish between facts and our attitudes to them.

Hare himself seems to be dissatisfied with this state of affairs. Thus he attempts to provide an epistemological underpinning, courtesy of Immanuel Kant. Apart from the active discriminating power of our minds or independent of our dispositions to accept criteria for distinguishing "facts" from "illusions" no facts, however "ordinary," can be known. Some attitude must be logically prior to any facts, since "there is no distinction between fact and illusion for a person who does not take up a certain attitude to the world."[119] In an earlier essay Hare introduced the concept of a "blik" for such a fundamental attitude.[120] All knowledge depends on attitudes and dispositions which transcend the particular "facts" made possible by them. "The Facts" cannot disprove such ultimate categories of thought, because what we are willing to recognize as a "fact" is relative to the ultimate category or "blik." If then religious quasi-factual statements have a large attitudinal component, they are at least not alone in this. Indeed, all human beings, whether religious or not, have their "bliks." Hare concludes "very tentatively,"

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[117] *Ibid.*, p. 189. [118] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

> Now Christians believe that God created the world out of chaos, or out of nothing, in the sense of no thing. . . . Is it possible that this is our way of expressing the truth that without belief in a divine order - a belief expressed in other terms by means of worshipping assent to principles for discriminating between fact and illusion - there could be no belief in matters of fact or in real objects? Certainly it is salutary to recognise that even our belief in so-called hard facts rests in the end on a faith, a commitment, which is not in or to facts, but in that without which there would not be any facts.[121]

And he continues elsewhere that belief in God is the "blik" about the world which makes me put my confidence in the future reliability of steel joints; . . . in the general non-homicidal tendencies of dons; in my continued well-being; . . . in the general likelihood of people like Hitler coming to a bad end."[122] This distinction between religious statements as assertions and as expressions of my fundamental blik about the world is Hare's way of interpreting Plato's distinction when he "said of the idea of the Good, which was his name for God, that it was not itself a being, but the source or cause of being."[123]

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[119] Ibid., p. 190.

[120] R.M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification," B, in Flew & MacIntyre (Eds.), New Essays in Philosophical Theology.

[121] R.M. Hare, "Religion and Morals," in B. Mitchell, Ed., Faith and Logic, p. 192.

Hare's account of the logic of bliks constitutes an advance over the views of the non-cognitive variety discussed above. Nevertheless, there appears to be an inconsistency. On the one hand, Hare maintains that "differences between bliks about the world cannot be settled by observation of what happens in the world."[124] As he sees it, a "blik is compatible with any finite number of such tests."[125] Yet, on the other hand, he makes a distinction between "insane" and "sane" bliks or between "right" and "wrong" bliks.[126] Surely, such a judgment must be based on some sort of tests. But if there are tests that count toward verifying or falsifying our bliks, then they are closer in function to assertions than Hare is prepared to admit. Concerning the lunatic who is convinced that all dons want to murder him, Hare asserts that "there is no behavior of dons that can be enacted which he will accept as counting against his theory; and therefore his theory, on this (falsifiability) test, asserts nothing."[127] But surely here it is mistaken to say that the lunatic's claim that all dons want to murder him asserts nothing. We do not judge a blik insane because it differs from the blik held by most people, but because of the way in which it differs. The lunatic's blik is insane because on its basis he puts forward an assertion and entertains certain expectations, yet will allow nothing to count against that assertion. That the lunatic will not allow present experience to count against his assertion is what leads us to believe that there must be experiences of the past, such as severe hurt in past relationships with those important to him, that are unconsciously operating as compelling reasons in support of his blik.

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[122] R.M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification," B, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 101.

[123] R.M. Hare, "Religion and Morals," in *Faith and Logic*, p. 192. The reference is to Plato's Republic, 509 b.

[124] R.M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification," B, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 101.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 100. [126] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

It is precisely, then, when a person will not listen to reason in a discussion of bliks, but clings to his position compulsively that we stop taking his assertions seriously as assertions and begin to look for the psychological pressures that are operative. In short, the distinction between sane and insane bliks depends upon the fact that the experiences to which we apply a blik do logically count for or against it.

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[127] _Ibid._, p. 100.

I want to further argue that the distinction between right and wrong bliks is really not the same as that between bliks held sanely and those held insanely. It, too, depends upon the ability of experience to frustrate or confirm our bliks. Whether we hold a blik sanely is a matter of whether we allow our experiences to count for or against the expectations that we have of our experience. Whether a blik is right is a matter of whether our experiences turn out to be what, holding that blik, we expect them to be. Thus one thinks, for instance, of Job's blik concerning God's rewarding of the righteous with prosperity, a blik which he gave up in the face of mounting experience to the contrary. Indeed, the process of maturing as a person appears to involve a continuous modification of one's bliks as things happen which run counter to one's expectations and opinions. One may, therefore, sanely hold a relatively wrong blik, modifying it as one goes along, or one may hold a right blik in such a way that nothing is allowed to count against it, i.e., insanely.

Two points become evident as a result of Hare's discussion of his own blik. First, a blik expresses expectations about future experience.[128] Second, the expectations expressed are far less definite than are those embodied in straightforward assertions, such as "The cat is on the mat." However, they are still of considerable or even ultimate importance. It is recognized that insofar as Hare's view draws attention to the relative indefiniteness of the expectations embodied in bliks, it is of value in clarifying the logical difference between the expression of a blik and an ordinary assertion about a particular matter-of-fact. Even though tests for bliks are less definite than those for ordinary assertions, they are tests nonetheless. To be sure, if the cognitive value of a statement is the guidance it gives concerning future expectations, then, as the expectations expressed become less definite, the cognitive value is less. This had led many skeptics of religion to deplore the vagueness of religious statements which seem to vanish to the point where nothing remains except the challenge to think positively. But however legitimate this worry may be, if bliks are an indispensable part of human life, then the criticism of a blik to the effect that it embodies less definite expectations than other more ordinary assertions is irrelevant and in itself made from the perspective of a blik.

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[128] He stated his confidence "in my own continued well-being (in some sense of that word that I may not now fully understand) if I continue to do what is right according to my lights." "Theology and Falsification," B, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 101.

Hare's account, then, of bliks as attitudes on which assertions depend but which are themselves "compatible with any finite number of . . . tests," is neither an adequate account of the logic of the perspectives from which we experience things nor consistent with his own distinction between sane and right bliks on the one hand and insane and wrong bliks on the other. Taken at face-value, Hare's account leaves him open to criticism leveled by Flew that, on this account, statements that religious people commonly make, such as "You ought to do it because it is God's will," reduce to "You ought to do it," except that the addition of the word "God" expresses the attitude of the speaker.

But there is more to be brought out about taking an attitude toward things than this. As John Hick has pointed out, what we also need to know is "whether the way the believer feels and acts is appropriate to the actual character of the universe."[129] And we may profitably recall John Wisdom arguing

> that when a difference as to the existence of a God is not one as to future happenings then it is not experimental and therefore not as to the facts, we must not forthwith assume that there is no right and wrong about it, no rationality or irrationality, no appropriateness or inappropriateness, no procedure which tends to settle it, not even that this procedure is in no sense a discovery of new facts.[130]

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[129] John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 99.

[130] John Wisdom, "Gods," in Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 159.

According to Hare, it may well be that we are tempted to call certain ordinary empirical facts supernatural facts "because our whole way of living is organised around them" and that this temptation "could be said to be the result of failing to distinguish in logic what cannot be distinguished in practice, namely, facts and our attitudes to them."[131] But Hare wrongly separates what he rightly distinguishes. Surely, we take up a certain attitude because of what we believe about the nature of the facts, so that if further experience and reflection convince us that his belief is in error, we change our attitude, a point which seems to elude Hare.

If it were the taking of a certain attitude toward the facts that made them religious, there would seem to be no justification in Hare's distinction between right and wrong bliks. Is it not rather something about the facts that evokes a religious attitude? This need not be a question as to whether there is a special realm of supernatural facts underlying the realm of natural facts. One may ask, instead, whether ordinary facts have some sort of religious dimension.

II. JERUSALEM AFFIRMATIONS

I refer to the following views as "Jerusalem Affirmations" because their proponents insist that God-talk must be seen as distinctly theistic in function, while still travelling the non-cognitive route. To suggest, as "Jerusalem Affirmations" does, an affinity between the people to be considered here and Tertullian (What has Jerusalem got to do with Athens?), the staunch defender of Christianity, may be more than a slight exaggeration. Yet, not only are these interpretations somewhat defensive in nature (I play my language-game and you play yours), but, although they may not, they too often issue in suggestions about man's sinful reason and rebellious pride which prevent him from recognizing his true situation. And after this declaration of war on reason we are set for a shouting match in which truth is measured by decibels. Fortunately, the positions to be considered here are not of that blatant nature and may consequently be quite useful in illuminating some facets of God-talk.

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[131] R.M. Hare, "Religion and Morals," in *Faith and Logic*, pp. 189-190.

The Worship Inducing Function of God-talk

In his essay "The Existence of God"[132] J.J.C. Smart advanced the thesis that the essential use of religious language, even the apparently discursive language of the proofs for the existence of God, is really worshipful. After an analysis of the traditional arguments for the existence of God he concludes that as arguments they cannot pass muster; indeed, logically speaking they are absurd and fallacious. Yet, the fact remains that they still command much respect even from some who have demonstrated their invalidity. How is this to be explained?

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[132] In Flew and MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 28-46.

Smart suggests that the cosmological argument, for example, reflects the "necessity" of God, but not a "necessity" of the kind traditionally assumed.

> It is not a logical necessity that God exists. But it would clearly upset the structure of our religious attitudes in the most violent way if we denied it, or even entertained the possibility of its falsehood.[133]

Rather, it is a "*religious*" necessity that God exists. "That is, we believe in the necessity of God's existence because we are Christians; we are not Christians because we believe in the necessity of God's existence."[134]

Similarly, the argument from design is faulty logically speaking.

> But in those who have the seeds of a genuinely religious attitude already within them, the facts to which the argument from design draws attention, facts showing the grandeur and majesty of the universe, facts that are evident to anyone who looks upwards on a starry night, and which are enormously multiplied for us by the advance of theoretical science, these facts have a powerful effect. But they only have this effect on the already religious mind, on the mind which has the capability of feeling the religious type of awe. That is, the argument from design is in reality no argument, or if it is regarded as an argument it is feeble, but it is a potent instrument in heightening religious emotions.[135]

As an attempt to isolate some uniquely religious factor in God-talk, this account is at best only suggestive. We are left with a number of questions which need to be considered before our understanding of God-talk can be advanced. What is a "religious mind" and how does one receive the capability for "feeling the religious type of awe"? How does this worshipful function differ from Ayer's emotive function?

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[133] *Ibid.*, p. 40. [134] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[135] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The Convictional Function of God-talk

An attempt in this direction is made by Willem F. Zuurdeeg, who finds himself in agreement with traditional positivism in its rejection of metaphysics and ontology[136] but insists that its category of emotive language is not adequate for the analysis of religious language. To label a person's God-talk as emotive obscures the fact that typically not only do his

> emotions, will, and persuasive intentions come into play, but so also does his intellect, and other aspects of his personality as well. That is to say: his whole person is involved, and it is not easy to say where the boundaries of "a whole person" are to be found. One cannot think of him apart from his wife, his children, his work, or his home.[137]

The result of his extensive study can be summarized by saying that for Zuurdeeg God-talk is not "indicative"

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[136] It is interesting but not really that surprising to note this agreement between "religious positivists" with their strong emphasis upon the categories of "revelation" and "The Word" and logical positivists.

[137] Willem F. Zuurdeeg, An Analytical Philosophy of Religion (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958) p. 36.

(referring to the empirical world) nor "analytical" (relating definitions to one another) but "convictional."

Positivistic analyses have all too easily assumed that in order to give an adequate account of language, all that is necessary is to analyse the language itself. But in order to give an adequate account of religious language one must replace this "logical analysis" by a "situational analysis" in which one gives an

> account of the language situation, to which belong: (a) the person who communicates, (b) the community within which the language functions, (c) the (subjectively) objective references of the languages, (d) the "worlds" within which these elements are related, (e) the historical background of these elements.[138]

For this purpose the "convictional" category is introduced, where "conviction" is taken to mean "all persuasions concerning the meaning of life."[139] The central part of having convictions is the experience of being convicted or "overcome" by "somebody or something," a "convictor." Concerning this convictor, however, Zuurdeeg is quick to add that analytic philosophy can only show that our convictions refer to "reality"; but it cannot really raise the question of whether or not this reference is veridical. For the task of analysis, "the only thing which counts is whether the objective reference is a reality *for the believer*."[140]

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[138] *Ibid.*, p. 17. [139] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 26; cf. also p. 45.

The restriction apparently rests on Zuurdeeg's conviction that faith is a matter of commitment rather than of objective understanding. This is indicated by his insistence that religious language is not something that the believer *uses* but is rather something that he *is*. To be a person is to establish a certain relationship with the world, with "all that is," a relationship that embodies what one judges to be the meaning of life. The self establishes that relationship, and thereby its existence as a self, by speaking religious or convictional language. Convictional language does not merely express that relationship. It is itself part of it. Consequently, convictional language has far deeper roots in the personalities of its employers than other forms of discourse. For example, the language that we classify as cognitive can be regarded as a tool that the self uses. Its meaning is its use. Not so convictional language. Therefore, to analyze the meaning of convictional language is not to analyze use but rather to analyze what it means to be a self. Zuurdeeg recognizes that people often "merely use convictional language, but in such cases, he points out, the speaker is not "a real, authentic self" but a "masked person."[141]

What it means to establish one's existence by speaking a convictional language can be analyzed only insofar as it is something "we can observe about people."[142] The facts that we can observe are what comprise the convictional language situation: "Since people *are* their convictions, the analysis of convictional language immediately leads to a consideration of the person who speaks the language and of all the other elements of the convictional situation."[143] A convictor, however, cannot itself be dealt with because it cannot be observed: "The origin of the convictions is acknowledged as lying in a domain which is inaccessible to rational understanding."[144] Such circumventing the question of the objective reference of the convictional experience leads to a kind of phenomenological account of the convictional experience. Convictional language, then, involves the intellect, since it involves a belief about something. But the questions as to what sort of reference this is and what counts for or against such a belief are removed from analytic consideration, because such questions are open to objective examination only in the case of use language. In convictional language the speaker is his language, and there are observations available concerning the speaker but not concerning the object of his belief.

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[141] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57. [142] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

But now one must ask whether it is not a mistake to try to isolate rational belief from questions concerning the rational criteria governing such belief. Is it not rather evident that rational belief by its very nature involves rational criteria, which, in turn, expose such belief to objective examination?

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[143] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 135; cf. pp. 291, 292, 295.

It appears, in my view, that Zuurdeeg has drawn a much too sharp distinction between "is" language and "use" language. To be sure, to refer to a person as being his language does have the merit of focusing attention on one of the important functions of that language, namely its function to help people to define themselves in terms of their ultimate convictions. This function must not be confused, however, with the cognitive function of that language in expressing belief about something. In this latter function the language is used, and, consequently, one may ask about the criteria that govern this referential use. This is very urgent in view of Zuurdeeg's claim that "the evidence in the meaning of empirical, factual evidence is not decisive for one's convictions."[145] The Christian conviction, he maintains, "is independent of evidence."[146] But insofar as conviction includes rational understanding, it becomes an open question how far the demands of the intellect can be satisfied if one suspends the criterion of adequacy of the facts. Innumerable systems having little or no bearing upon reality could satisfy the demand for internal consistency, and a broadly pragmatic criterion cannot by itself distinguish between acting as if something were true and believing that it is true. Zuurdeeg admits that his point "is not to say that evidence does not play any role at all."[147] However, here one must insist to know what role Zuurdeeg is prepared to accept. His vague remark that "many times people are convinced in spite of the so-called facts"[148] is not very helpful. In what sense does a conviction continue to involve rational understanding? This question cannot be avoided as it is in Zuurdeeg's account. If rational assent is part of what is meant by "conviction," as Zuurdeeg would have it, then an analysis of conviction ought to include an examination of its rational criteria.

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[145] *Ibid.*, p. 29. [146] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

In view of Zuurdeeg's insistence that analysis can have no bearing upon the question of the reality of the convictor nor philosophy evaluate religious or any other language, one wonders, furthermore, on what grounds he launches his somewhat emotive attack on metaphysics which, in his opinion is "a matter of the misuse of language and of confusion of its functions"[149] in which the use of reason and certain of its concepts appropriate to one sort of language, typically the scientific or logical, is erroneously transferred to language of a different sort, the convictional.[150] And one is really puzzled to learn that convictional language of the revelational sort is beyond such analysis. This unequal treatment seems accountable only as an expression of Zuurdeeg's own convictions. An application of his approach would merely lead to the recognition of an enormous amount of convictional realities which mean something to their respective adherents, but to which even the check of logical consistency is inappropriate. However, there is in this novel attempt at analysis the recognition of the radical difference between language that is merely used and language which is intimately bound up with the speaker's most fundamental appraisal of himself.

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[147] *Ibid.*, p. 29. [148] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 19. [150] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

The Commitment Function of God-talk

In distinction to Zuurdeeg's non-logical understanding of God-talk as convictional, Ian T. Ramsey's work has been distinguished by close attention to logic and what he calls the "empirical anchorage" of religious language. He stands in the tradition of the "encounter with God" thinkers, a tradition which he has undoubtedly made more palatable because of his empirical bent of mind. We must devote some space to some background material before we can focus on Ramsey's own thought.

A significant number of theologians and philosophers of religion, notably Martin Buber and Emil Brunner, have given central importance to an immediate experience of God as personal, often referred to in the tradition as an encounter with the divine Thou. These terms are based on a distinction which has been heavily emphasized by the existentialists and which Buber himself has championed. It is the distinction between our experience of another when we approach him in an impersonal, external, detached manner, and our experience of him when we empathize into his life as he personally lives it from within. In the first instance we experience the other person, and indeed anything else in the world, merely as an object or an "It" that can be observed, conceptualized, measured, and even manipulated, as, say, a voter or a sales clerk. In the second instance we experience the other person not in a subject - object relationship, but rather in a relation of subject to subject. Such a relation is direct, mutual, and involves a response which is absent in the detached impersonal attitude the first instance. Only as we encounter the other person in response and dialogue does he become a "Thou" for us. Paul Tournier wrote,

> The person always eludes our grasp; it is never static. It refuses to be confined within concepts, formulae and definitions. It is not a thing to be encompassed, but a point of attraction . . . which demands from us . . . an attitude, which moves us to action and commits us.[151]

The encounter theologian emphasizes that our experience of God is always personal, i.e., always similar to our personal experience of other human beings. Consequently, God cannot be experienced as an "It," because there is nothing about God that can be objectified. Out of this approach two points arise with respect to the verification issue. First, it is emphasized that, although every human being experiences the impersonal dimensions of reality, the ability to experience the world in a personal way is not something that is automatically given. Rather, it is an achievement which may be attained by different people in different degrees. And failure to experience God as personal may simply be due to a person's impersonal manner of relating. Second, encounter with the divine Thou is an experience that is not open to doubt. It is the very nature of the experience of encounter that one is immediately aware of being confronted by another Thou. Thus the whole issue of verification pertains only to the world as we impersonally experience it, the world of "It." God, however, may not be objectified. He transcends the split between subject and object, and, consequently, may not be approached by means of a language whose logic pertains to the impersonal world and is therefore subject to verification rules.

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[151] Paul Tournier, The Meaning of Persons (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. 179.

Nevertheless, encounter theologians insist that encounter with the divine Thou has external reference. This assertion, i.e., that an external reference is part what is immediately given in experience, presents a logic radically different from the logic governing assertions about the existence of particular entities. This latter logic takes into consideration the fact that our experience may be subject to error. I may see a cloud on the horizon which turns out to be a mountain range. The belief that I experience a finite object is formulated in a system of language rules that include public testing procedures for verifying or falsifying statements asserting that belief. If this belief is falsified, my experience is not changed. It simply was what it was. But this has to do with the subjective experience and not with the external reference of that experience. Not so with an encounter of the divine Thou. As C.B. Martin notes,

> Because "having direct Experience of God" does not admit the relevance of a society of tests and checking procedures it places itself in the company of other ways of knowing which preserve their self-sufficiency, "uniqueness," and "incommunicability" by making a psychological and not an existential claim.[152]

The encounter theologian, while he may sympathise with Martin's complaint, can only reply that public testing procedures are inapplicable to personal knowledge. The "sense of meeting a Thou" is taken from our experience of the other not as an object, our statements about which are susceptible to verification procedures, but as a person who, as Tournier put it, "refuses to be confined within concepts, formulae and definitions." As a "Thou" the other can be named and addressed, but not described and observed.[153] Our knowledge of the "Thou" of the other is simply given in our immediate personal encounter with him. And the same is also true of our knowledge of God.

This ingenious claim of encounter theologians, if it could be upheld, would successfully answer the verification challenge. However, in order to be successful two points would have to be established: (1) It must be shown that our experience of the other as personal is quite different and unrelated to our objective[15ba] experience of him. (2) It must further be shown that there is a close analogy between our experience of a finite Thou and a divine Thou. It appears to me that the encounter theologian runs aground on both of these points.

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[152] C.B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 85.

[153] For a helpful discussion of this issue I am indebted to Ronald Hepburn's *Christianity and Paradox*, pp. 56ff.

As to (1), I would like to argue that our experience of the other as personal, while being quite different from our objective experience of him, is not separable from the latter. Indeed, I think we can go further and state that our experience of the other Thou is only possible by means of our objective experience of him. To quote Tournier again,

> The person pure and simple does not exist. The real inner encounter . . . is enveloped in the external dialogue which expresses it. Even when this communication is felt in silence . . . this silence is itself charged with the words that have been exchanged before it began.[15b]

This point is conceded even by existential psychotherapists who make so much of the distinction between the personal and the objective. For instance, Rollo May writes,

> Obviously a knowledge of the drives and mechanisms which are in operation in the other person's behavior is useful; a familiarity with his patterns of interpersonal relationships is highly relevant . . . and so on *ad*

[15b] Paul Tournier, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[15ba] Under the word 'objective' on this and the next two pages, I mean to include both the element of the 'impersonal' and the element of the 'external' that I have just been treating separately.

> *infinitum*. But all these fall on to a quite different level when we confront . . . the immediate living person himself. When we find that all our voluminous knowledge about the person suddenly forms itself into a new pattern in this confrontation, the implication is not that the knowledge was wrong; it is rather that it takes its meaning . . . from the reality of the person of whom these specific things are expressions.[155]

Thus when we encounter another person as Thou, the objective facts about him are not left behind but are then seen as expressions of that person. In that way our personal knowledge of the other retains its link with verification rules. Indeed, apart from the availability of objective tests, the sense of personal encounter may itself be illusory in so far as we interpret it as an experience of the personal presence of another. Suggested Ronald Hepburn rather pointedly, "I may speak of John, 'sensing' his presence with me, although unknown to me John may have quietly slipped out of the room, thinking that I had fallen asleep."[156] John's absence does not necessarily make my "response" of no significance to our relationship, but the fact remains that the "sense" of presence was unreliable.

Checking procedures, then, do accompany our talk about the existence of another Thou. Our personal experience of another is inseparable from our objective experience of him. But it is this objective aspect which is not part of our experience of God, the encounter theologians insist.

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[155] Rollo May, "Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy," in May, Angel, Ellenberger (Eds.), *Existence*, p. 38.

[156] Ronald Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox*, p. 34.

This brings us to (2) the question of the analogy between our experience of a finite Thou and a divine Thou. Here it must be asked with Hepburn whether we can "allow experiences of encountering God to elude absolutely every checking procedure, without a grave risk of eroding away the original analogy altogether."[157] True, the encounter theologian makes an important distinction between personal and impersonal forms of knowledge. And while I agree further that checking procedures for assertions about personal and divine Thous may be less specific and more difficult to establish since especially assertions about God often do concern the whole life and can only be tested by the entire life-process, the general point remains that the existence of some sort of tests is essential for the maintenance of the claim that a statement has objective reference. The claim of the encounter theologian is, after all, not simply that he has certain experiences but that these are experiences of a divine being who is loving, just, all-powerful, etc.. Now to say this is to give an interpretation of these experiences and to say something about their significance for life as a whole. One who considers them to be experiences of a divine being, will hold certain expectations concerning these experiences which will not be held by those who interpret them differently. The realisation or frustration of these expectations is the verification or falsification of this interpretation.

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[157] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

The meaning, then, of the predicates applied to God must be specified in terms that go beyond the encounter experience alone. The encounter theologian has usually maintained that the believer's choice of predicates as symbols to express the meaning of his encounters is governed by the expectation that although these symbols cannot be used to speak in some literal sense about God they will, if we choose them rightly, enable us to enter into direct relation with God. Our choice of the right symbols is based on past encounters.

It is at this point that we must turn to Ian T. Ramsey's work. We begin with an exposition of his Fragments for Metaphysics. The function of metaphysics is to provide a "word map" with reference to which we may plot our "cosmic position." Its language is selective and coordinating, as are the languages of logic, mathematics, and the sciences. Through the language of these disciplines we articulate selected aspects of experience which we order in a manner determined by the purposes of a particular inquiry. This requires a refinement of "ordinary language," and the development of a technical vocabulary. Similarly, the language of metaphysics cannot be simply an extension of ordinary language. It may select from and use features of ordinary language for its own distinctive purposes in such a way, however, that it is in constant contact with and be explicable in terms of ordinary language.

The function of metaphysics with respect to the sciences is integrative, states Ramsey. Although each science can provide partial knowledge of the world, no science as such can provide knowledge that integrates the results of several particular inquiries. Sciences may suggest integrative concepts, and metaphysical systems have been developed around concepts whose "home base" is a particular science. But metaphysics, in performing its unique integrative function, must go beyond the legitimate functions of scientific concepts in that it must also "express the nonobservable."

In his writings Ramsey repeatedly returns to the experience of "I" as the paradigm case of experience of the nonobservable. Adequate expression of the experience of "I," he asserts, must transcend all descriptions of observables, which collectively constitute not "I" but "me" or "he." "If we could give our identity descriptively, our individuality would have disappeared."[158] Employing a term which is crucial in his thought, he claims that "I" is not observed, but "disclosed." Disclosures, in turn, must be evoked. Ramsey employs a number of arresting examples of human situations, in which, through a series of words and events, one comes to a point where "the penny drops" or "the ice breaks" and one "sees" what cannot be described through objective language. The most crucial or revealing of these are "limit situations," in which some expression of what Tillich called "ultimate concern" evokes and reveals the self in its innermost depths and individuality.

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[158] Ian T. Ramsey, *Prospects for Metaphysics: Essays of Metaphysical Exploration* (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1961), p. 166.

Now the word "I" is not only the paradigm word for the experience and expression of the unobservable; it also functions as the "integrator word" of individual experience. Its expression indicates the focus of coordination of all "my" experience in "my" world. The word "world" could presumably function as the "integrator" word for the broader range of public experience. But Ramsey is most concerned to show that in theological metaphysics the word "God" functions appropriately as the supreme integrator word for the "cosmic mapping" of all experience. And just as the awareness of "I" must be evoked through circumstances which "cause the penny to drop," so the awareness of God as the supreme integrator must be evoked.

Religious language, suggests Ramsey, attempts to refer to the observable world in such a way as to evoke and express an awareness of personal depth to that world. Moreover, "with this discernment there now goes a personal commitment" to that which is disclosed, a commitment which the purely objective, impersonal experience of reality could not elicit.[159] This personal depth is something "which we discern as having a claim on us."[160] Religious language attempts to serve this function of "bringing alive" our objective situations by referring to them in ways that are logically "odd." This logical oddness takes three different forms. First, there are "the attributes of negative theology: such as 'immutable,' 'impassible,'"[161] which are designed to negate and negate and negate until "the penny drops" and the experience and commitment response are elicited. Second, theological statements may attempt to bring about the final commitment by approaching asymptotically such limiting concepts as "unity," "simplicity," or "perfection" until "the ice breaks" for the listener.[162] Third, there is still another set of "traditional attributes and characterizations: e.g., "First Cause"; "Infinitely Wise"; "Infinitely Good"; "Creator ex nihilo"; "Eternal Purpose."[163] In each of these cases, we have a "model" ("Cause," "Wise," "Good," etc.), which expresses a meaning with which we are familiar, and a "qualifier" ("First," "Infinitely," etc.), which suggests a way of "developing" this meaning which may lead to a religious disclosure. For example, "we take goodness as a model - a word which gives us at once some picture of good behaviour, of a good man."[164] The qualifier "Infinite" bids us to move through a sequence of "stories of good lives" in the direction of greater and greater goodness and

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[159] Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 29.

[160] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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[161] *Ibid.*, p. 50. [162] *Ibid.*, p. 50. [163] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

> to continue long enough with the sequence to evoke a situation characteristically different from the terms which preceded it; until we have evoked a situation not just characterized by a goodness which we admire or feel stirred to follow, but a situation in relation to which we are prepared to yield everything, "soul, life and all."[165]

The use of such "models" for understanding and talk about the world is inescapable. Such models, whether scientific or theological, are neither replicas nor pictures, but they aim to show some congruence of structure, to "echo" or "chime in with" some features of that which they model. In science such models can provide ways in which theory, deductive systems, and especially mathematical treatment can be applied to previously uninterpreted phenomena. The better a model is, the more prolific it will be in generating deductions open to empirical verification and/or falsification.

Similarly, in Christian theology, models in biblical discourse are found to unite and explicate the perception of Jesus as "Messiah" or "Logos." Theological models, in other words, enable us to talk with less than precision but also with less than total ambiguity about life as organised around and expressed in the integrator-word "God." But theological models are not productive of verification or falsification in the manner of scientific models. For the kind of perceived congruence with experience that their authentication requires, Ramsey uses the term "empirical fit." They are found to be congruent with and illuminative of the total experience of life; metaphysically speaking, they are found to provide the best "cosmic map." Like scientific models, they "arise out of, and in this way become currency for, a universe that discloses itself to us in a moment of insight."[166]

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[165] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

> For theology is founded in occasions of insight and disclosure when, to put it at its most general, the universe declares itself in a particular way around some group of events that thus take on cosmic significance.[167]

This, admittedly, is an extremely brilliant attempt to explicate the function of God-talk. However, a great deal rests on the concepts of "disclosure" and "discernment." Is not the whole theological situation here reduced to a kind of subjectivism? Ramsey emphatically denies this.

> There is no question of a characteristically religious situation being merely "emotional," if that word is thought to claim that the characteristic features we have been mentioning are entirely (in some sense or other) "subjective." Let us emphasize, without any possibility of misunderstanding, that all these situations, . . . when they occur, have an *objective* reference and are, as all situations, *subject-object* in structure. When situations "come alive," or the "ice breaks," there is objective "depth" in these situations along with and alongside any subjective changes.[168]

But denial is not enough here. If these disclosures have "*objective* reference," as Ramsey insists, something will have to be said about their cognitive status and in what ways they are subject to some kind of test.

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[166] I. T. Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 19.

[167] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[168] I.T. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, pp. 27-28.

The Reference-Fixing Function of God-talk

Ian Crombie in his contribution to the "Theology and Falsification" discussion[169] and in a subsequent article on "The Possibility of Theological Statements"[170] has also focused on the logical oddness of God-talk. He argues that the word "God" in the Christian tradition functions not quite as a description, though in some sentences it is predominantly this; not quite as a proper name, though in some of its most revealing sentences it is closest to this; and not quite as a fictional subject, though it is employed with some of the license appropriate to such subjects. It is, says Crombie, an "improper proper name."[171] Statements that are made about this subject are not controvertible by evidence. Yet, it will not suffice to classify all of them as simply or merely requests, expressions of feeling, or commendations of attitudes or policy.

Rather than dismiss theological statements as hopelessly confused because they cannot be fitted into nontheologically prescribed categories, Crombie suggests that one ought to be prepared to at least entertain the possibility that they "fix the reference" of theological discourse.[172] In other words, theological discourse roughly specifies the general limits of what is being talked about by eliminating all improper objects of reference from theistic discussion and by suggesting realms of non-theological discourse such as ethical, historical, cosmological, etc., to which theological speech is somehow relevant. Within this reference range a concept of the divine is specified by reference to a being characterized by absence of the human limitations such as space - time location, limitations we can easily feel as dissatisfactions even while we are unable to conceive positively the kind of being which could be free from such limitations. But in view of this "it is extravagant to say that we have no notion whatsoever of how the word is used."[173]

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[169] "Arising from the University Discussion." *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 109-130.

[170] In B. Mitchell, ed., *Faith and Logic*, pp. 31-83.

[171] I.M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements," *Faith and Logic*, p. 40.

True, when we apply our ordinary terms to God we know that their meaning changes, and because we cannot conceive God's nature, we do not know what their new meaning is. Therefore, when we apply words to God we continue to mean by them what we ordinarily mean by them. By this "speaking in parables" we at least are able to form some idea of the sort of world that one who believes in God will expect this world to be.[174] Certain experiences, such as suffering, then, do run contrary to the believer's expectation and, so, count against his beliefs. But the believer will not allow anything to count decisively against his beliefs, because he believes that in the life to come they will be confirmed.[175]

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[172] Ibid., pp. 50 ff. [173] Ibid., p. 60.

[174] Ibid., pp. 69-71.

On what basis, a critic might ask, are terms then selected for application to God, as for example the term "Creator"? Crombie replies,

> Firstly, on the fact that we find ourselves impelled to regard the events recorded in the Bible and found in the life of the church as the communication of a transcendent being, and that the image is an essential part of this communication; secondly, on the fact that the more we try to understand the world in the light of this image, the better our understanding of the world becomes.[176]

The first point introduces sheer commitment as the basis for selection and is similar to Ramsey's position.[177] It is the second point which appears to be the more promising one, for if theological images are capable of shedding light on our understanding of the world, then the questions of possible tests for and the cognitive status of such images becomes quite important.

Unfortunately, Crombie does not develop this point extensively. The closest he comes to it is when he speaks of the third "fortress" of faith of the believer which he adds to the compelling authority of Christ and the expected confirmation in the life to come, namely "that in the religious life, of others, if not as yet in hiw own, the divine live may be encountered."[178] This, however, is not further elaborated. Instead, Crombie refers his readers to Basil Mitchell's essay "The Grace of God."[179] Mitchell suggests here that God's activity "issues in discernible differences," yet, "we cannot with confidence predict what these will be."[180] He goes on to say,

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[175] Ian M. Crombie, "Arising from the *University Discussion*," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 124.

[176] Ian M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements," *Faith and Logic*, p. 81.

[177] Alasdair MacIntyre also rested justification of theological parables on sheer acceptance of Christian authorities. Cf. A. MacIntyre, "The Logical Status of Religious Belief," in Toulmin, Hepburn, MacIntyre, *Metaphysical Beliefs*.

> if in certain people there appears a quality of life which is out of scale with its natural antecedents, and if such people move us in an unaccountably profound and yet not morbid fashion, and if we ourselves from time to time are aware, or seem to be aware, of an unsuspected power, informing but not distorting our natural faculties, then we may see in these things the grace of God perfecting nature.[181]

If expectations need not be very definite to play a significant role in our orientation toward life, then, surely, there is a significant difference between the expectations of believer and skeptic concerning experience in this life. However, it is still to be noted that these expectations concerning "the grace of God perfecting nature" are not distinctive of God as a being. The discussion centers around the effects of God's actions. But what indication can be given of the sort of reference God has?

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[178] Ian M. Crombie, "Arising from the *University* Discussion," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 129.

[179] Ian M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements," *Faith and Logic*, pp. 149-175.

[180] B. Mitchell, "The Grace of God," *Faith and Logic*, p. 170.

[181] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

According to Crombie, we do not know "to what to refer our parables; we know merely that we are to refer them out of experience and out of it *in which direction*."[182] This direction is given by certain elements of religious awareness which are part of our experience. Among these

> perhaps the most powerful is what I shall call a sense of contingency. Others are moral experience, and the beauty and order of nature. Others may be actual abnormal experiences of the type called religious or mystical. There are those to whom conscience appears in the form of an unconditional demand; to whom the obligation to one's neighbor seems to be something imposed on him and on me by a third party who is set over us both. There are those to whom the beauty and order of nature appears as the intrusion into nature of a realm of beauty and order beyond it. There are those who believe themselves or others to be enriched by moments of direct access to the divine.[183]

This sense of the finitude of the world and so of a contrasting infinite over against it, is the basis of the believer's concept of a divine being, the "undifferentiated theism" to which he gives content by applying the parables of his faith. He knows that these elements can be interpreted in other ways, but he feels that he is "bringing out more of what they contain or involve."[184]

I have no quarrel with Crombie's starting point.

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[182] I.M. Crombie, "Arising from the *University* Discussion," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 124.

[183] *Ibid.*, p. 111-112. [184] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

If we are to give meaning to the subject term of religious assertions, surely, we must take into account all elements of religious awareness in experience and not only one facet of these as, for example, Flew does in his gardener parable. The question is whether Crombie has sufficiently marked out a genuine difference between regarding the world as if it were under the control of a divine being and really believing that such a being exists. What is the difference between believing and not believing "facts which lie outside our view," i.e., outside our experience? It appears that the difference must lie in certain expectations concerning future experience of these facts. After all, if the believer, in asserting that there are such facts, does not entertain expectations not shared by the skeptic, can he be said to have made an assertion?

CHAPTER IV

THE CASE FOR COGNITIVE SIGNIFICANCE

The previous chapters have in a more or less concealed manner indicated that I do sympathise with what Hepburn has called "metaphysical theology."[185] Now it is true that the verification challenge was intended to eliminate, if not all theology, at least this type of theology, which purported to somehow penetrate "appearance" to a higher "reality." At this point I would argue that it has only served to refine it. In the verification discussion it surely became evident that a number of claims made by theologians were doubtful, if not unwarranted, and could only be maintained if one was prepared to cut all diplomatic relations with Athens and retreat to Jerusalem. The self-assured confidence manifested in so many older texts in systematic theology had to give way to a much more tentative and empirical outlook.

But those who presented the verification challenge received their bumps and bruises also. Kai Nielsen has gone on record suggesting that logical positivism as a movement is stone dead.[186] While one may argue how dead "stone dead" is, it is undeniably clear that its representatives no longer hold the iconoclastic position that many found so liberating years ago. First there emerged the difficulties with the demand for conclusive verification. Then it was recognized that the verification principle did not cut any hay as a criterion of meaning. The insight could not be avoided that there are perfectly meaningful sentences, indeed even cognitively meaningful sentences, which do not even purport to be verifiable. And they are not emotive either. Not too many people would care to quarrel with the demand that the questions of meaning and verification be kept distinct. After all, unless we know what a sentence means how can we tell whether it is verifiable? Nielsen further suggests that the challenge went wrong in its insistence upon phenomenalism, i.e., the claim that statements about the material world are entirely reducible to statements about sensa actual and possible, and in its stress on the priority of ostensive definition over all other forms of definition.[187] He goes on to restate a more modest challenge to the effect that for a genuine factual assertion it must be possible "to show what it would be like for the assertion to be true or probably true and what it would be like for the assertion to be false or probably false."[188]

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[185] "Metaphysics," in A. Richardson (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, pp. 212-213.

[186] Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1971), p. 31.

As one endeavoring to tread the shifting sands of metaphysical theology, even the escape to Jerusalem remains questionable. While I can bring myself to wistfully admire types of Barthian fideisms, the price of acceptance is too high. If one has to lay aside at the outset already freedom and intelligence to decide knowingly, what is left to offer to God, assuming one finds him?

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[187] *Ibid.*, p. 33. [188] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Sandwiched between the ridicule of Athens and the persecution of Jerusalem, the task at hand is to make the first steps toward a metaphysical theology which will allow one who has been in that sandwich existence for some time to make sense out of life.

It appears to me that such metaphysical theology must meet the following criteria: it must be rational, i.e., it must appeal to people who think and reflect and are puzzled by the world around them; it must have as its subject matter the world as a whole, or, in other words, it must appeal to human experience in its widest possible sense; it must refer somehow beyond the world as it is present to the senses; and it must be explanatory in the sense of referring to the divine in order to explain what would otherwise be left puzzling and unclear.

The first task in such an attempt will have to be the task of showing in what ways God-talk can be understood as assertive. A beginning can be made with a point developed by Wittgenstein.

In the _Investigations_ Wittgenstein analyzes the verb "to see" and introduces the concept of "seeing as."[189] He suggests that when we contemplate a given picture or form, we have the option of seeing it as one thing or another. The point is that we never merely see, but rather that we "see as" and what we "see as" depends upon our interpretation. Consequently, seeing necessarily involves interpretation.[190]

This point is of considerable significance for it suggests that when two observers differ as to what they are seeing, it is still true that they are seeing the same facts. In this respect there is no factual difference between them. One does not see a fact or facts which are hidden from the other. Yet, one sees the total picture quite different from the other.

Wittgenstein raises the troublesome question as to the nature of the differences: "But what is different: my impression? my point of view? - Can I say? I describe the alteration like a perception; quite as if the object had altered before my eyes."[191] And if one attempted to clarify the difference between the two observers contemplating the same picture by asking them to make models, the two models would be factually identical. Wittgenstein poses the following situation:

> I suddenly see the solution of a puzzle picture. Before

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[189] Part II, pp. 193e ff.

[190] Wittgenstein uses the example of the "duck-rabbit," an image which can be seen as a rabbit or a duck. (Ibid., p. 194e.)

[191] Ibid., p. 195e.

> there were branches there; now there is a human shape. My visual impression has changed and now I recognise that it has not only shape and colour but also a quite particular 'organization'. - My visual impression has changed; - what was it like before and what is it like now? ' If I represent it by means of an exact copy - and isn't that a good representation of it? - no change is shown.[192]

Hence Wittgenstein asserts that "'Seeing as . . .' is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like."[193] Thought does enter into the difference. "If you are looking at the object, you need not think of it; but if you are having the visual experience expressed by the exclamation, you are also *thinking* of what you see."[194] Wittgenstein's analysis relentlessly hammers away at one point: to show how complex the process of seeing is.

The relevancy of this analysis to metaphysical theology, where what is contemplated is not one single object but rather one's entire experience of the world taken as a whole, is readily evident. I now want to explore within the context of a classic essay what is involved in seeing the entire world as one thing rather than as another. I am thinking here of John Wisdom's celebrated essay "Gods," which features the garden parable which in turn became a source of inspiration to Antony Flew.[195]

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[192] *Ibid.*, p. 196e. [193] *Ibid.*, p. 197e.

[194] *Ibid.*, p. 197e.

[195] The essay appeared first in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* in 1944. References given are from John Wisdom's *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* where the paper is reprinted in full.

At the outset Wisdom observes that "the existence of God is not an experimental issue in the way it was."[196] This conviction, i.e., that theism cannot be dealt with in terms of observations, tests, and predictions has been reiterated by empiricists from Hume to Ayer. Most of them went on to say that therefore theistic issues are really pseudo-issues of enormously time-wasting dimensions. It is here that Wisdom disagrees, suggesting that many significant issues besides those of theism are not amenable to experimental reasoning, yet, are real issues which one can discuss quite rationally and about which people can make decisions leading to responsible action. His parable is designed to show that the theistic issue is closely related with seeing the world as one thing rather than as another. In this parable about two people returning to their long-neglected garden all the facts are in. Nothing is hidden from either of the two. Neither can they hope that their differences can be resolved by the discovery of fresh facts. No factual difference divides believer from unbeliever. One selects and interprets one group of facts as evidence for theism, the other selects a different constellation of facts as counter-evidence. Is then the difference merely a matter of subjective taste and feeling, a nervous theist may inquire? That, in Wisdom's opinion, is an altogether too simple solution.

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[196] John Wisdom, "Gods," in *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis*, p. 149.

By ascribing meaningfulness to questions to which answers can be found by patiently describing "what we have observed," Wisdom hopes to show that theological questions are real and significant questions. Scientists, he suggests, do something of the kind in their theory-making:

> Newton with his doctrine of gravitation gave us a so much greater apprehension of nature not so much because he told us what we would or would not see . . .. but because he enabled us to see anew a thousand familiar incidents.[197]

This amounts to the outright rejection of the empiricistic principle which has attracted so much attention. There are two reasons which Wisdom offers for his rejection: 1) the sheer quantity of inescapable, significant human situations which cannot be handled in experimental and observational terms and 2) the fact that it is possible to elucidate epistemological techniques which can be applied to settle non-experimental truth-claiming issues. We must consider each of these two reasons more closely.

Wisdom suggests that one type of inescapably significant human situation takes place in law-courts. In such courts the fact that disagreeing counsel are agreed as to the facts of the case, which are open to all, does not at all mean that the issues to be settled are not real ones. No one is seriously tempted to describe such a non-experimental disagreement as metaphysical and therefore nonsensical. An attempt must be made to interpret the facts, to find a significant pattern in them. Moreover, the logic applied in resolving non-experimental differences is also reflected in the ruling of the judge. He too is required to interpret, to find a significant pattern in what has been disclosed.[198] In another paper he writes:

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[197] Ibid., p. 7.

> To hint that when we are concerned with questions which are still unanswered when we have left no stone unturned, no skid mark unmeasured, then thinking is no use, is to forget that when the facts are agreed upon we must still hear argument before we give judgment. To hint that, when argument cannot show that in the usual usage of language the correct answer is Yes or No it shows us nothing, is to forget that such argument is in such a case just as necessary and just as valuable for an apprehension of the case before us as it is in those cases when it happens that we can express that greater apprehension in a word - Guilty, Not Guilty, Mad, Not Mad, Negligent, Not Negligent, Cruel, Not Cruel.[199]

In another passage he returns to the same point in the form of a dialogue with an imaginary sceptical philosopher of law, who argues that legal questions are really decisions about wise, expedient action, rather than questions of truth.

> Argument must be heard. Argument which is not merely any psychological procedure which obtains a certain result, but a procedure in which we set this by that, and that by this, so as to see more clearly than we did at first what it was that happened, and then and only then to act. To describe such a procedure as a process primarily of persuasion to a line of action, to say that a search for the truth is not of the essence of the procedure, is to say what is dangerous, defamatory and false.[200]

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[198] John Wisdom, "Gods," in *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis*, p. 158.

[199] John Wisdom, "The Logic of God," in *Paradox and Discovery*, p. 7.

[200] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

In support for his contention that basically non-experimental questions may still be real and significant, Wisdom further offers the case of two people contemplating a picture or natural scene. One says "Excellent" or "Beautiful" or "Divine"; the other says "I don't see it." Yet, surely each sees what the other sees. So the difference is not about the facts. Still, the disputants do not regard the difference between them as a matter of arbitrary or contrary taste. The same applies to similarly aesthetic situations such as listening to music. "The difference as to whether a God exists . . . involves our feelings more than most scientific disputes and in this respect is more like a difference as to whether there is beauty in a thing."[201]

We turn now to Wisdom's second claim, the claim that it is possible to elucidate epistemological techniques which can be used to settle non-experimental truth-claiming issues. First, we want to get clear on the logic which is being employed here. Wisdom underlines that it is "not a *chain* of demonstrative reasoning," "not that of a chain of deductive reasoning as in a mathematical calculation."[202] Rather, one goes over his case by "presenting and re-presenting . . . those features of the case which *severally co-operate* in favour of the conclusion." The reasons "are like the legs of a chair, not the links of a chain," the reasoning involved "is not *vertically* extensive but

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[201] "Gods", p. 159. [202] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

horizontally extensive."[203] He speaks here of "connecting and disconnecting."[204] The purpose of connecting techniques is to reveal or prove beauty, to remove a blindness, to induce an attitude which is lacking. In applying this technique, one tries to call to attention the overall picture by pointing up the presence and importance of different aspects, connecting these into an overall pattern in order to get the partner in the dialogue to see things as one sees them himself. This is what the prophet Nathan does with King David. In order to illumine a behavior pattern in David, he puts beside it a story of another behavior pattern and draws connections. And in the case of the disconnecting technique the attempt is made to convince the other person that his connections are unwarranted.

In his paper "The Logic of God" Wisdom speaks of "a move in thought which from a mass of data extracts and assembles what builds up into the proof of something which, though it doesn't go beyond the data, gives us an apprehension of reality which before we lacked."[205] This, so far, is sufficiently clear, but it does raise the question of how the conclusion of such a non-experimental argument is related to factual knowledge, a question which is quite crucial for my case.

It is by no means self-evident what Wisdom claims on this point. A surface reading of "Gods" almost tends to convince one that no factual difference is being argued for. The two disputants in the garden are agreed that the gardner hypothesis "is now not a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect."[206] Each of them defends his conclusion about the garden "in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect."[207] This unwillingness on the part of Wisdom to describe the differing conclusions as unmistakenly factual can be traced to his recognition of a lack of further empirical observation which could be brought in. From such passages one may easily conclude that his position is that the conclusions of non-experimental disputes involve no reference to what is in fact so.

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[203] *Ibid.*, p. 157. [204] *Ibid.*, pp. 159 ff.

[205] "The Logic of God," p. 13.

But there is another side to Wisdom's position which emerges quite clearly when one pays close attention to his terminology. Thus, in the parable the theist disputant exclaims, "I believe that someone comes. . . . I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this."[208] Hence the conclusion is a form of a reasoned belief and clearly a belief that X is as a matter of fact the case. The same point is made in his analysis of "giving a name." If one disputant exclaims "a garden!", the other "a wilderness!", then each insists on the features of the case which are "in favour of calling the situation by the name by which he wishes to call it."[209] Such belief, Wisdom insists, has a logic and a rationality of its own and is by no means arrived at in some arbitrary fashion "and though the decision manifests itself in the application of a name it is no more merely the application of a name than is the pinning on of a medal merely the pinning on of a bit of metal."[210] Consequently, the conclusion of such arguments brings one to a new apprehension of reality which was not there previously.

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[206] "Gods," p. 155. [207] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

[208] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

> Whether Mr. So-and-So of whose conduct we have so complete a record did or did not exercise reasonable care is not merely a matter of the application of a name or, if we choose to say it is, then we must remember that with this name a game is lost and won and a game with very heavy stakes. With the judge's choice of a name for the facts goes an attitude, and the declaration, the ruling, is an exclamation evincing that attitude. But *it is an exclamation which not only has a purpose but also has a logic*, a logic surprisingly like that of "futile," "deplorable," "graceful," "grand," "divine."[211]

On occasion Wisdom states quite plainly that the issue is in a sense a factual one. While we must understand these passages in the light of those in which he insists that such facts are not actually or potentially observable, it is still a case in which reasons for or against may be offered. Thus we must guard against the premature judgment that when differences as to the existence of God are not as to future happenings, there is no right and wrong about it and that the procedure is in no sense a discovery of new facts.[212]

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[209] *Ibid.*, p. 157. [210] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[211] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Again, Wisdom's view of the factuality of the theistic conclusion comes through when, after having conceded that there could not be an absolutely certain proof of God, he suggests,

> But that doesn't mean that there are no evidences of God's existence; it doesn't mean that there are no proofs of his existence; nor that these are not to be found in experience; not even that they are not to be found in what we see and hear.[213]

And there is an even stronger suggestion in the same essay.

> . . . We must insist that a person who in speaking of the gods expresses no belief as to what in fact is so is essentially different from one who does. Can we allow that his words still express what are in essence religious beliefs? Can we say that it is not of the essence of what we mean by a religious pronouncement that it should express some belief as to what the world is like? . . . I cannot here argue this question at length. But I believe the answer is No. It seems to me that some belief as to what the world is like is of the essence of religion.[214]

What conclusions can be drawn from Wisdom's analysis of the logic involved in religious belief? Firstly, it might be said that he laid to rest the positivist notion that theological issues are a time-wasting nonsense since there are no readily available experimental methods by which disputes can be settled. Secondly, his analysis provides suggestive hints as to how a metaphysical theologian might proceed in the development of a postanalytic natural theology. Thirdly, his work on religious belief serves as a strong reminder that any attempt to articulate a theory of religious truth-claims must pay attention to aesthetic, existential, and other non-experimental issues.[215]

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[212] *Ibid.*, p. 159. [213] "The Logic of God," p. 12.

[214] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

A similar reminder is found in yet another parable developed by Basil Mitchell as a reply to Flew. Here attention is given to the relation of basic beliefs to personal and historical events. The opening paragraph sets the stage:

> In time of war in an occupied country, a member of the resistance meets one night a stranger who deeply impresses him. They spend that night together in conversation. The Stranger tells the partisan that he himself is on the side of the resistance - indeed that he is in command of it, and urges the partisan to have faith in him no matter what happens. The partisan is utterly convinced at that meeting of the Stranger's sincerity and constancy and undertakes to trust him.[216]

Subsequently, the Stranger is sometimes seen helping members of the resistance, but at other times betraying them. The partisan's friends begin to regard the Stranger as a traitor, but the partisan continues to trust him even though he "recognizes that the Stranger's ambiguous behavior does count against what he believes about him. It is precisely this situation which constitutes the trial of his faith."[217]

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[215] This is quite evident when one compares Wisdom's work with Flew's work. By limiting himself only to the garden parable, Flew extracts the theistic evidence of natural order and regularity which is particularly vulnerable to Humean scepticism and goes to work on it. What he shows in the end is that the teleological argument is too small and insufficient a basis for any theism.

[216] Basil Mitchell, "Theology and Falsification," in Flew & MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 103.

The parable is characterized by features with which one is already familiar from Wisdom's and Flew's attempts at parable-making. Again the disputants are in disagreement about the correct interpretation to be put on a total factual state of affairs which is again ambiguous. But there are important new accents which need examination. No longer do we have two visiting observers to a garden, but participants involved in a very real and danger-fraught situation. Thus a note of existential urgency is injected. The participants must declare their position in relation to the Stranger and in view of the ambiguous evidence. In this manner the elements of trust and faith are emphasised which are vital factors in a believer's total outlook. As a result the data are much more complex than the data appealed to in the parables of Wisdom and Flew. And they do justice to the Christian claim that certain historical events, regarded as revelatory of God's nature, form an important part of the data which give rise to the Christian viewpoint.

Mitchell's interpretation of religious beliefs as assertions that experiences may count for or against, and his suggestions concerning the indefiniteness that to some degree is characteristic of their logic appear to me to be quite sound. What I want to question, however, is the significance which he gives to faith when he suggests that faith is incompatible with any genuine testing of its assertions.[218] There is to my mind a difference between the situation of the partisan and that of the believer which is too significant to be overlooked. The believer's understanding of God is problematic in a way in which the partisan's understanding of human beings is not. Or, linguistically, we may say that the rules governing our talk about finite persons are relatively well established, while the rules of God-talk are not so clear. Indeed, it is just because of this that the charge of the meaninglessness of God-talk arose.

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[217] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Now, since in terms of our language rules we understand what it means to trust one another, the partisan's understanding of what it means to trust the Stranger is relatively clear, while the believer's understanding of what it means to trust God is relatively unclear. This raises the question of how closely we can identify what is and what is not a trusting relationship with God with any one set of rules by which we attempt to understand that relationship. Although to enter into a relationship includes, as an important factor, the way we understand its meaning, it is also much more than this. When our understanding of a relationship is altered, then has the relationship necessarily been broken or may it not simply have been altered and perhaps for the better? What has to be asked here is whether the believer could not allow experience to test his understanding of God without this constituting a test of his trust in God. Indeed, does not trust in God require that we refuse to treat as an absolute anything that is the product of finite minds, including the most central of our assertions about God? If we refuse to test the images of God which are expressed in our articles of faith, do we not turn these into idols? Mitchell's suggestion that in order to use religious language meaningfully we must "master a conceptual apparatus" which is the interpretation that a religious tradition has placed upon the revelatory events recorded in the Bible[219] appears to be quite correct. The question now is whether testing and changing that interpretation must be regarded as a failure in faith. Could one not argue that it is idolatrous to refuse to test a religious tradition? How are we to determine what interpretation constitutes the most reliable and fruitful application of the theistic picture to the whole of our experience if not by the test of our experience?

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[218] The conclusion of Mitchell's essay is: "The Christian, once he has committed himself, is precluded by his faith from taking up the first attitude: 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' (i.e. to regard his assertions as provisional hypotheses to be discarded if experience tells against them). He is in constant danger, as Flew observed, of slipping into the third (i.e. to regard his assertions as vacuous formulae to which experience makes no difference and which makes no difference to life). But he need not; and, if he does, it is a failure in faith as well as in logic. *Ibid*., p. 105.

It appears that not only Mitchell's position but the entire discussion in "Theology and Falsification" suffers from the failure to distinguish between challenges to faith as a relationship with God and challenges to a way of conceiving God. To reach a negative conclusion about one conception of God is not necessarily a turning away from God. It may be only a turning away from a doubtful way of conceiving of that relationship. Job decided against a conception of God which his friends were prepared to defend to the uttermost. Saint Paul fought tenaciously against the belief which he himself had once accepted, i.e., that the Law is essential to true faith. Belief in an earth-centered universe was once defended as essential. In each case man's understanding of his relation to God has been changed as the expectations embodied in that understanding have been frustrated by experience.

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[219] Basil Mitchell, "The Grace of God," Faith and Logic, p. 164.

My point against Mitchell is simply that it is well possible for a believer to treat statements about God as hypotheses to be discarded if experience tells against them without suffering a failure in faith. Within the Christian tradition as I understand it, there has always been a recognition of the inadequacy of human conceptions of God combined with the insistence that the believer is a person on the way, a person who does not come from truth, as it were, but who is on the way toward it. Consequently, challenges to one's thinking about God, including the verification challenge, can be accepted openly and even with a sense of gratitude. Openly, for the believer realizes, or ought to realize, that a healing relationship to God is not conditional on any interpretation achieved by human minds. And with gratitude for any serious re-thinking undertaken because of the challenge can only lead to a better understanding. Thus I would concur with J.A.T. Robinson, who writes,

> What looks like being required of us, reluctant as we may be for the effort involved, is a radically new mould, or *meta-morphosis*, of Christian belief and practice. Such a recasting will, I am convinced, leave the fundamental truth of the Gospel unaffected. But it means that we have to be prepared for *everything* to go into the melting - even our most cherished religious categories and moral absolutes. And the first thing we must be ready to let go is our image of God himself.[220]

To engage into such a far reaching examination and reinterpretation of the Christian faith appears to many, Christians and non-Christians alike, as abandonment and betrayal. As a result, people like Robinson come under cross-fire from both the staunch defenders of the faith and the equally staunch atheists. It appears that both are quite opposed to any disturbance of the status quo, even if for different reasons.

When Flew in his reply to Mitchell insists that the latter's interpretation of God as omnipotent rules out the "plausible excuses for ambiguous behaviour"[221] which are available in the case of the finite Stranger, then this is more a challenge to the adequacy of Mitchell's concept of omnipotence in the theistic picture than a challenge to faith in a loving God.

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[220] J.A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 124.

[221] Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, p. 107.

We need to look more closely at Mitchell's defense of his conception of an omnipotent being. Against Flew's criticism that such a conception is empty Mitchell argued that there are expectations contained in the believer's assertions about a loving, all-powerful God that are not entertained by the religious sceptic. However, there is something odd about these expectations. The believer expects certain things not to happen which he knows do happen. He finds himself holding side by side conflicting expectations: those of his religious belief and those based on everyday experience. According to his faith, certain things should not happen which experience teaches him do happen. As far as the occurrence of evil is concerned, the expectations of believer and sceptic do not seem to differ. But genuine assertions are about what our experience in the world is and will actually be like. The question then is: do religious assertions really function in any way as guides as to what we may expect actually to happen?

Here Mitchell maintains that the believer does expect something different of experience in the long run. It is after the war that the Stranger's ambiguous behavior will be clarified, and the partisan differs from his friends concerning what the result of that clarification will be. Similarly, the believer traditionally has entertained expectations that the ambiguities of his experience in this life will be clarified in the life to come. The claim might be, then, that it is here that the differences in expectation between believer and unbeliever become real.

John Hick has attempted to defend this claim with his idea of "eschatological verification."[222] He registers his dissatisfaction with the notion that the Christian faith is a "blik" - a way of looking at the world which is in principle neither verifiable nor falsifiable. He acknowledges that verifiability is a valid criterion of factual significance. Consequently, "a state of the universe which satisfies the faith-assertions must differ in some experienceable way from states of the universe which fail to satisfy them. In other words, the existence of God must be experientially verifiable."[223]

Hick is thus fully prepared to accept the verification challenge. Before he does so, he raises some preliminary considerations of the concept of verification, at the core of which, he suggests, is the removal of ignorance or uncertainty concerning the truth of a proposition. He first insists that verification is a combined logical and psychological concept.

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[222] John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (2nd Ed.), (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), Ch. 8.

[223] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

> It refers to an experience, the experience of ascertaining that a given proposition or set of propositions is true. To this extent verification is a psychological notion. But of course it is also a logical notion, for not *any* experience is rightly called an experience of verifying. Both logical and psychological conditions must be fulfilled in order for verification to have taken place.[224]

Furthermore, says Hick, when we are concerned with the verifiability of propositions as the criterion for their having factual significance, the notion of prediction becomes central. If a proposition contains or entails predictions which can be verified or falsified its character as a genuine assertion is thereby established. What has to be noted here is that predictions are always conditional.[225] This may at times be so obvious that no special mention is made of it. At other times verification requires unusual proceedings and efforts. Little is required of the observer if he is to verify a prediction concerning tomorrow's weather. If, however, he were to verify the behavior of molecules, the conditions to be met are quite considerable. The point then is that every subject matter demands its own particular methods of verification.

> The logic of "table" determines what you must do to verify statements about tables; the logic of "molecule" determines what you must do to verify statements about molecules; and the logic of "God" determines what you must do to verify statements about God.[226]

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[224] *Ibid.*, p. 171. [225] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[226] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

This insight frequently does not receive the attention it warrants in the discussions on the verifiability of God-talk. Simple assertions of the "The cat is on the mat" variety serve as models and the possibility that God-talk might call for a much more complex procedure is not thoroughly investigated. In this connection it is also of interest to consider the question of what constitutes public verification. Asks Hick,

> When A, but nobody else, has ascertained that p is true, can p be said to have been verified; or is it required that others also have undergone the same ascertainment? How public, in other words, must verification be? Is it necessary that p could in principle be verified by anyone without restriction even though perhaps only A has in fact verified it? If so, what is meant here by "in principle"; does it signify, for example, that p must be verifiable by anyone who performs a certain operation; and does it imply that to do this is within everyone's power?[227]

It appears that it is incumbent upon us to determine for each subject matter what type of verification ought to be obtainable.

Ever since Flew's essay "Theology and Falsification" it was apparently assumed that verification and falsification are symmetrically related, or, in other words, that the questions, "What possible experiences would verify 'God exists'?" and "What possible experiences would falsify 'God exists'?" are two sides of the same coin. Hick reminds us that such is not necessarily the case. "There are cases in which verification and falsification each correspond to a side on different coins, so that one can fail to verify without this failure constituting falsification."[228] He introduces as an example the hypothesis of continued conscious existence after bodily death. It contains a prediction which, if true, can be verified in one's own experience. But it cannot be falsified if it is false. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the meaningfulness of the hypothesis.

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[227] Ibid., p. 171-172.

After these preliminary considerations Hick is ready to present his case for the verifiability of basic theological statements. He too has a parable to tell. It features two travellers, one a believer, the other a sceptic, moving along the same road. The believer expects to arrive at a "Celestial City." The sceptic does not expect to get anywhere. There is only the road and all the good and bad breaks which happen without any predictable pattern. Thus the two travellers differ in their attitudes. The believer sees every good break as an encouragement and further confirmation of his being on course. And every hardship is seen as a trial with purposes of its own. The sceptic also enjoys the good and endures the bad, but he does not interpret these events as part of some overarching purpose. As long as they are in the process of their travel,

> the issue between them is not an experimental one. They do not entertain different expectations about the coming details of the road, but only about its ultimate destination. And yet when they do turn the last corner

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[228] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

> it will be apparent that one of them has been right all the time and the other wrong. Thus, although the issue between them has not been experimental, it has nevertheless from the start been a real issue. They have not merely felt differently about the road; for one was feeling appropriately and the other inappropriately in relation to the actual state of affairs. Their opposed interpretations of the road constituted genuinely rival assertions, though assertions whose status has the peculiar characteristic of being guaranteed retrospectively by a future crux.[229]

Again, the believer finds it much easier to accept this parable as a description of his life of faith. There is the puzzling state of affairs which cannot be tackled experimentally. The evidence is thoroughly ambiguous and allows two totally different interpretations of the total factual complex. There is a strong emphasis on trust and the data which are introduced reflect much more adequately than those of the garden parable the believer's experiences. Within the context of the journey the notion of movement is introduced, and, even more important from the Christian viewpoint, the future receives proper emphasis.

At this point it is evident that the notion of interpretation, which was quite crucial in Wittgenstein's account of "seeing as" as well as in Wisdom's and Mitchell's parables, must receive some attention. Again, we can turn to Hick's work in the epistemology of religion, of which his notion of "eschatological verification" is but the tip of an iceberg.

Hick speaks of religious faith as the "interpretative" element within religious experience which enables the believer to find "significance" within reality. All knowledge is consciousness of significance which builds up a stable and ordered world rather than an "empty void," "a churning chaos" or a sheer "buzzing, booming confusion."[230] Correlated with "significance," which Hick defines as "that fundamental and allpervasive characteristic of our conscious experience which *de facto* constitutes it for us the experience of a 'world',[231] is the term "interpretation." This term suggests "the possibility of differing judgments; we tend to call a conclusion an interpretation when we recognize that there may be other and variant accounts of the same subject matter."[232] Both terms, "significance" and "interpretation," point to a "suggestion of ambiguity in the given."[233] The point to notice, then, is that at all levels of cognition "significance" and "interpretation" are important factors. There is no such thing as bare cognition emerging from neutral, unstructured experience. Even in the simplest forms of sense perception, what is minimally given is a construction or interpretation of stimuli by the percipient. And not only isolated objects can have significance, but also "groups of objects standing in recognizable patterns of relations to one another."[234] This Hick calls

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[229] Ibid., pp. 177-178.

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[230] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99. [231] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[232] *Ibid.*, p. 101. [233] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[234] *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

"situational significance." Objects thus grouped are not always material ones. Nonmaterial entities such as sounds, lights, odors, psychological events, and other peoples' thoughts, emotions, and attitudes also play a significant part in these groupings. Moreover, Hick insists that "significance" is essentially related to action,"[235] or, in other words, interpretation guides behavior.

Hick explains that "we may be involved in many different situations at the same time" and that "there may thus occur an indefinitely complex interpenetration of situations."[236] His thesis is that situational significance can be divided into three orders, those of nature, man, and God; the second superimposed upon and presupposing the first, and the third superimposed upon and presupposing the first two.[237]

The sensorily perceived order of nature, the world of scientific descriptions, involves us in interpretation. The laws discerned in it are the distinctive interpretive elements within its order of significance. Such interpretation carries us "into an objective world of enduring, causally interacting objects, which we share with other people."[238] This activity enables human beings to map out their natural environment, to plan, to predict, and to integrate their actions with the laws of the natural order.

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[235] _Ibid._, p. 99. [236] _Ibid._, p. 106.

[237] _Ibid._, p. 107. [238] _Ibid._, p. 109.

Similarly, when we move from the physical world of scientific description and inquiry to the world of persons and interpersonal relations, we see all the complex data which characterize the human level, but we also recognize an element of freedom and responsibility constitutive of moral agents. At the human level, moral obligations are just as clearly ingredients in the situational significance as are the causal laws scientifically apprehended. Hick gives an example.

> A traveler on an unfrequented road, . . ., comes upon a stranger who has met with an accident and who is lying injured and in need of help. At the level of natural significance this is just an empirical state of affairs, a particular configuration of stone and earth and flesh. But an act or reflex of interpretation at the moral level reveals to the traveller a situation in which he is under obligation to render aid. . . . The situation takes on for him a peremptory ethical significance, and he finds himself in a situation of inescapable personal responsibility.[239]

The moral dimension of the situation, says Hick, may not be immediately apparent to us. It may take time for it to dawn upon us. When it does, something happens

> that is comparable to the discovery of an emergent pattern in a puzzle picture. All the same lines and marks are there, but we have now come to see them as constituting an importantly new pattern, so the social situation is there with the same describable features, but we have now come to be aware of it as laying upon us an inescapable moral claim.[240]

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[239] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[240] "Religious Faith as Experiencing-As," in Vesey, *Talk of God*, p. 30.

Thus, in the moral as well as in the purely natural situation an act of interpretation is demanded. But at the moral level "the interpretation is a more truly voluntary one" than in the natural. This is so because "it is not forced upon us from outside, but depends upon an inner capacity and tendency to interpret in this way, a tendency which we are free to oppose and even to overrule."[241]

Lastly, there is the third order of existence, the divine. Just as we perceive sticks and bricks in the context of a sense-based network of physical interpretation at the natural level, and are also aware of the reality of free and responsible moral agents at the human level, so the theist recognises God as the final and inclusive level of interpretation and existence. The theistic interpretation, Hick insists, is a "total interpretation." It appeals to all facts of experience and shares its status as total interpretation with other worldviews. Since at this level the scope of interpretation is all-inclusive, assertions about it are not "experimental" in the sense that we can compare data at hand with some other data. We cannot appeal beyond the universe in order to compare it with some other universe. The theist, the humanist, and the materialist appeal to the same data. They order the data differently and stress different clusters and patterns. Thus theism is, as much as any other total interpretation, a perception of the nature of the universe as a whole. And in this sense it is cognitively warranted.

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[241] John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (2nd. Ed.), p. 112.

Hick thinks that he is justified to speak of such a total interpretation as a matter of cognition on the grounds that interpretation of significance combined with an element of unresolved mystery characterises all cognition.

> There is in cognition of every kind an unresolved mystery. The knower-known relationship is in the last analysis *sui generis*: the mystery of cognition persists at the end of every inquiry - though its persistence does not prevent us from cognising. We cannot explain, for example, how we are conscious of sensory phenomena as constituting an objective physical environment; we just find ourselves interpreting the data of our experence in this way. We are aware that we live in a real world, though we cannot prove by any logical formula that it *is* a real world. . . . The same is true of the apprehension of God. The theistic believer cannot explain *how* he knows the divine presence to be mediated through his human experience. He just finds himself interpreting his experience in this way. He lives in the presence of God, though he is unable to prove by any dialectical process that God exists.[242]

It is within the context of this theory that Hick's parable must be interpreted. But even then, in all fairness, we have to ask whether Flew's challenge can be met by widening the meaning of terms such as "perception" and "cognition," even when one has shown that an element of interpretation is involved in sense perception. To speak of the theistic interpretation (or the humanist interpretation for that matter) as a perception is slightly gratuitous. Hick is aware of this. Consequently, he does not rest his case for the cognitivity of "God exists" as an assertion on the logical characteristics which the theist shares with other total interpretations. The evidence for all such interpretations, he says, is ambiguous and the issue is not experimental. Yet, if the affirmation of a total interpretation is to be taken as an assertion, as in principle verifiable, there must at least be a conceivable possibility that the evidence will become sufficiently unambiguous so as to exclude rational doubt. Here, notes Hick, the theistic claim is unique in that it suggests just that in its world-view, which entails the belief that human beings survive bodily death. As noted before, the logical peculiarity of the claim is that it is asymmetrical: there can be conclusive evidence for it if it be true, but there is no evidence against it if it be untrue. It is this notion of "survival of bodily death" which is crucial for Hick's "eschatological verification."

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[242] *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

Again, it is possible to object here that afterlife experiences do not qualify as evidence and thereby call to attention the differences in clarity and preciseness between Hick's eschatological verification and the verification demanded by those who share Flew's concern. However, we may also say that afterlife experiences do count as evidence and thereby call to attention the similarity between the logics of Hick and Flew, i.e. that both demand the expression of expectations concerning future experience. Or, if we put it a little differently, Hick's language game is cognitive if cognition has to do simply with expectations rather than with the sorts of expectations which can be enunciated with a high degree of clarity. Surely, the quest for clarity is a noble one. But if it leads us to the position that reality is such that if it can be grasped, it can be grasped with clarity, we might do well to reconsider. It would appear that the degree of clarity to be required of a given subject matter cannot be established in advance by applying criteria which may be valid in other areas, but should ultimately be determined by the subject matter in question.

Thus far Hick has maintained that a survival prediction such as found in the Christian tradition is in principle subject to future verification. He is, of course, aware that survival as such is not sufficient to verify theism. After all, mere survival, with a new body in a new environment, may simply continue the same religious ambiguity of the present life. The task, therefore, is to investigate whether one can conceive of afterlife experiences which would verify theism. Hick thinks that can be done.

> There are, I suggest, two possible developments of our experience such that, if they occurred in conjunction with one another (whether in this life or in another life to come), they would assure us beyond rational doubt of the reality of God as conceived in the Christian faith. These are, *first*, an experience of the fulfillment of God's purpose for ourselves, as this has been disclosed in the Christian revelation, and *second*, in conjustion with the first, an experience of communion with God as he has revealed himself in the person of Christ.[243]

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[243] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

To show the empirical or experiential content of such a claim, it is now necessary for Hick to say what we would have to experience in order for it to be the case that the divine purpose is fulfilled in our own experience. His description of that divine purpose as

> the bringing of the human person, in society with his fellows, to enjoy a certain valuable quality of personal life, the content of which is given in the character of Christ - which quality of life (that is, life in relationship with God, described in the Fourth Gospel as eternal life) is said to be the proper destiny of human nature and the source of man's final self-fulfillment and happiness.[244]

is by his own admission vague and analogous to that of a young child wondering what it would be like to be an adult. But the important point is that one can say this much without being cognizant in advance of the exact form which such fulfillment will take.

In addition, some empirical sense must be given to "the fulfillment of God's purpose," which allows one to apprehend it as God's purpose and not simply as a natural state of affairs. This, Hick avers, is achieved by "an experience of communion with God as he has made himself known to men in Christ."[245] The emphasis is on the phrase "in Christ" for it is the doctrine of the incarnation which enables us to make sense out of the notion of "communion with God."

> It is true that even the experience of realizing the promised Kingdom of God, with Christ reigning as Lord

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[244] Ibid., p. 188. [245] Ibid., p. 189.

> of the New Aeon, would not constitute a logical certification of his claims nor, accordingly, of the reality of God. But this will not seem remarkable to any philosopher in the empiricist tradition, who knows that it is only a confusion to demand that a factual proposition be an analytic truth. A set of expectations based upon faith in the historic Jesus as the incarnation of God and in his teaching as being divinely authoritative could be so fully confirmed in post-mortem experience as to leave no grounds for rational doubt of the validity of that faith.[246]

An important philosophical objection has been raised here by Kai Nielsen which is of fundamental import to the issue of the verification of God-talk. Referring to the first of the two verifying conditions offered by Hick, he writes,

> But what we do not know is what it would be like to verify "There is divine existence." We have no idea at all of what it would be like for that statement to be either true or false. . . . And . . . to appeal to the divine purpose for man assumes we already know what it would be like to verify that our lives have such a purpose. We do not know what must be the case for it to be true or false that our lives have a purpose, a *telos*, a destiny or final fulfillment. We do not know what must happen for us to assert correctly that so and so is "apprehended as the fulfillment of God's purpose and not simply as a natural state of affairs."[247]

And referring to the second condition, he asserts:

> Unless we already understand what is meant by "God," how can we possibly understand such words as "Christ," "The Christ," "The Son of God," or "Our Lord Jesus Christ"? How can utterances incorporating them be used to make verifiable statements? What would count as verifying them? What *conceivable* experiences, post-mortem or otherwise, would tell us what it would be like to encounter not just Jesus, but the Christ, the Son of God, and the Son

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[246] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[247] Kai Nielsen, "Eschatological Verification," in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 9 (1963), pp. 276-277.

> of Man, or our Lord, where "Our Lord" does not just mean a wise teacher or a monarch when we meet either now or hereafter? If we do not know what it would be like to verify "God exists" directly, we have no better idea of what it would be like to verify "The Son of God exists," where ~~the~~ "Son of God" is not identical in meaning with Jesus.[248]

In the second edition of his Faith and Knowledge Hick replied to Nielsen's objection. He admitted that it is difficult, or even impossible to state in full what it is for God to be real. Consequently, Nielsen is right in his observation that the notion of eschatological verification does not enable one to set forth the truth-conditions of "God exists." But, says Hick, the notion was not invoked to do this. Rather, "it was invoked to establish that the statement "God exists" is factually true-or-false."[249] There is no suggestion that the fulfillment of these eschatological expectations defines the meaning of "God exists." He insists that it is possible to tell the difference between God existing and God not existing without fully knowing what God means. Indeed, such combination of knowledge and ignorance is a very common epistemological situation. Nielsen himself granted that point when he wrote in another essay that we can and often do use a word correctly without being able to give a satisfactory analysis of its meaning.[250] Thus Hick concludes:

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[248] Ibid., p. 277. [249] Hick, op. cit., p. 197.

[250] Kai Nielsen, "God and Verification Again," Canadian Journal of Theology, 11 (1965), pp. 136-137.

> The starting point and basis of the Christian use of the word "God" remains the historical figure of Jesus, as known through the New Testament records. Under his impact we come (in some degree and at some times) to experience life in a distinctively new way, as living in the presence of the God whose love was revealed in the words and actions of Jesus. Is the appropriateness of this response to the haunting figure of Jesus . . . in any way verifiable by future events? Surely our participation in an eschatological situation in which the reality of God's loving purpose for us is confirmed by its fulfillment in a heavenly world, and in which the authority of Jesus, and thus of his teaching, is confirmed by his exalted place in that world, would properly count as confirmatory. It would not . . . amount to logical demonstration, but would constitute a situation in which the grounds for rational doubt which obtain in the present life would have been decisively removed. Such eschatological expectations - without the detailed imagery in which earlier ages have clothed them - are an integral part of the total Christian conception of God and his activity. And they suffice, I suggest, to ensure the factual, true-or-false character of the claim that God, as so conceived, exists.[251]

Nielsen, however, remained unconvinced and further sharpened his criticism in his recent book *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*. The charge is circularity: "Hick appears at least to assume what he needs to establish by argument to make his case for the factual meaningfulness of theistic utterances such as 'God governs the world' and 'God loves mankind'."[252] In the elucidation of this charge Nielsen distinguishes between a theistic sentence and a non-theistic sentence. A theistic sentence is defined as

> either a sentence of the type "God exists" when that sentence is taken to be capable of making a theistic truth-claim, or a sentence that will only be known to be

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[251] Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

[252] Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1971), p. 75.

> meaningful if we know that "God exists" is meaningful and that it is at least believed it can be used to make a religious truth-claim.[253]

A non-theistic sentence is one "we can know to be meaningful without making or at least assuming such claims."[254] Now, according to Nielsen, if we are to avoid a vicious circle, it is necessary that at least the verifying conditions of theistic sentences must be expressible exclusively in non-theistic sentences.

> If this condition does not obtain, one is in effect assuming, in the sentences utilized to make what are taken to be verifiable statements, exactly what one sets out to establish, namely that there are factually meaningful and verifiable *theistic* statements, i.e. statements made by using *theistic* sentences assertively.[255]

Since Hick does not draw such a distinction, he fails to notice that his verifying conditions are not specified exclusively in non-theistic terms. Consequently, he has not met Flew's challenge.

> To show that God-talk can make factual and experientially verifiable truth-claims, Hick must show how these putative theistic truth-claims are experientially verifiable by what are at least conceivable experiences characterisable in non-theistic terms.[256]

What are we to make of this demand that the verifying conditions of theistic sentences must be expressible exclusively in non-theistic sentences? People who have sought to counter the verification challenge by questioning the status of the verification principle might be tempted to continue that strategy. Is Nielsen's demand applicable to all verification procedures? Is it necessary, for example, that the verifying conditions of scientific sentences must be expressible exclusively in non-scientific sentences? What prevents a theologian from saying, "Sorry, but I do not recognize this to be a legitimate demand?"

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[253] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[254] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[255] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[256] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

I do not know how Hick would respond to the demand. As far as I am aware he has not published a reply. However, Terence Penelhum has come to Hick's aid. We recall Hick's suggestion that what is needed to verify the claims of a theist is a future community of persons whose relationship to one another represents the sort of fulfillment of human personality indicated in the gospels, and who experience communion with God as revealed in Christ. This, as it stands, is quite obviously a theistic statement. Can it be converted into a non-theistic statement which has the same verificatory value? Penelhum has argued that it can be done.

> If we say that there will be a community of persons infused by grace, over whom Jesus will return to reign as the Son of God, obviously we make a theistic statement. Suppose, however, we say that there will be a community of persons whose personalities are *as they would be if* they were infused by grace, i.e., manifesting love and righteousness, that Jesus will rule over this community in the manner in which the Son of God would, i.e., in love and forgiveness, *and* that they would describe this community as one infused by grace and ruled by the Son of God? These statements could be known to be true by someone who did not know that God existed. At least they do not entail that God exists. I would suggest that if someone were to find himself in a world in which these non-theistic predictions turned out to be true, he would be irrational if he did not take this as verifying the claims of Christian theism

with which these predictions are associated.[257]

In reply to Hick's statement "There is a community of persons infused by grace over whom the Son of God reigns," Nielsen argued that it would be quite possible for a sceptic in his post-mortem life to deny this and simply assert that this was a community of thoroughly good human beings ruled over by Jesus.[258] And, I would think, Penelhum's non-theistic formulation is still open to the same reply. Nielsen can even now say, "There are no experiences, actual or conceivable, post-mortem or otherwise, which would even infirm the sceptic's putative assertion and confirm the theist's."[259] For, as Roger Shiner pointed out, such a community is defined in terms of behaviour and intentional beliefs of its members[260] and consequently its presence cannot have more probative force than, say, the community of Jesus and his disciples at the first century A.D..

Can we say now, as Penelhum suggests we ought to, that if someone, whether believer or sceptic, were to find himself in a world in which non-theistic predictions turned out to be true, he would be irrational if he did not take this as verifying the claims of Christian theism? I would think we are still facing a stalemate. The example in itself has no probative force, allowing both believer and sceptic to take different views of the likelihood of the verificatory statements ever turning out to be true.

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[257] Terence Penelhum, "Is a Religious Epistemology Possible?" in *Knowledge and Necessity* (Vol. III of the Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures), p. 275.

[258] Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 78.

[259] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[260] In a discussion of this point.

Something else has appeared now. One begins to appreciate the enormous gap between "verification in principle" and "eschatological verification." When Ayer speaks about "verification in principle" he applies this concept within the context of empirical existence now and here. But when Hick uses the concept to move into some future life after death, I cannot help but feel that the issue has been removed from further discussion. It is very much like the move made by a defender of a verbally inspired infallible Bible who is confronted with different and sometimes contradictory manuscript readings. Driven into a corner he exclaims that verbal inspiration applies only to the original autographs which are unfortunately no longer available. That ends further rational argument rather abruptly.

The time has come to draw a number of conclusions in reply to the verification challenge. What the challenge, formulated by Flew and Nielsen, demands is that the believer specify in advance, here and now, the empirical conditions which would show a statement such as "There is a God" to be true or false. The implication of the challenge is that if such conditions cannot be specified, nothing is really asserted.

In making the challenge both Flew and Nielsen use as a logical model the concept of a scientific hypothesis, which by definition is a tentative statement to be investigated. Furthermore, it is also the case that such hypotheses are tied to verification or falsification conditions in the manner in which Flew thought that assertions are tied to what Kellenberger has called "empirical denials."[261]

Against this challenge I would first want to suggest that Flew and Nielsen have a bit of a vicious circle going for themselves. The issue under investigation is whether a religious or a non-religious interpretation of the world is the most illuminating and the most rational. If we now establish as a ground rule, as Flew and Nielsen insist we must, that we will accept as true assertions only those statements which can be tied to empirical denials, then the case is already decided. The best that can be done under these rules is to do what Hick did, i.e., push eschatological verification, which is an indirect admission that the issue cannot be settled without the introduction of some form of after-life. Of course, Flew and Nielsen are not prepared to accept this for it is essential for their case that the believer specify in advance, here and now, the empirical conditions which would show the statement "There is a God" to be true or false.

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[261] James Kellenberger, "The Falsification Challenge," *Religious Studies,* No. 5 (1969), p. 70.

Secondly, and in view of the exposition in this chapter, I would argue that it is not essential that all assertions, religious or non-religious, can be tied to empirical denials. Kellenberger argued that the fairly straightforward statement "John loves Mary" may in certain complex situations have no empirical denial.[262] For example, we might specify that if John showed no concern for Mary and was cruel to her, this would constitute an empirical denial of the assertion "John loves Mary." Yet, regardless of the empirical conditions specified, details could still emerge which would explain why John showed no concern and was cruel and still loved Mary. Flew insisted that there must still be a set of empirical conditions which would in the new circumstances that emerge show "John loves Mary" to be false.[263] That, I think, can be granted. However, the point is that these empirical conditions could not have been specified in advance when the statement was made and all the intricacies surrounding the relationship of John and Mary were not known. In other words, what Flew's comment allows has some important consequences for his case. It permits the conclusion that the falsification condition may not be known at the time the assertion "John loves Mary" is made, yet a genuine assertion has been made. On the same grounds we may now argue that "God exists" can now be an assertion even if we cannot lay down falsification conditions in advance.[264]

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[262] *Ibid.*, p. 72ff.

[263] Antony Flew, "The Falsification Response," *Religious Studies*, No. 5 (1969), p. 78.

Thirdly, I would contend, that little can be gained by short-circuiting the important issue as to whether a religious or non-religious interpretation of the world is the more illuminating and more rational by means of the verification challenge. Thus I am quite prepared to accept Kellenberger's proposal which specifies the following requirement:

> If someone says he believes something and knows what it is he believes, he should be able to give us its logical denial where that denial is not merely a syntactical denial. That is, he should be able to fill out the denial as was done, for instance, by replacing "succubi" with "female demons who visit sleeping men." But while this point seems right, it holds perfectly well for religious statements. As we have already observed, "There is a God" has a filled-out denial that the god of Moses, and Abraham, of the old and new covenants, does not exist.[265]

Thus I would suggest with Wisdom that the issue is still one in which reasons for and against can be offered. Sometimes in legal disputes it is tempting for opposing counsel to accuse one another of irrationality and meaningless talk, but it is not particularly helpful and a wise judge will prevent that kind of strategy in court. Perhaps it is also possible to have reason prevail in the dispute between believer and unbeliever while we sift through the evidence for both sides. Because of the enormous complexity of the issue and perhaps also because of the existential import for the participants, it is probably foolhardy to expect reasonable people to make up their minds in a hurry, in the same manner, and on the merits of one argument. There are things that count for belief and there are things that count against belief. And decisions are being made all the time. To this not only lost but also found faith attests.

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[264] See James Kellenberger, *Religious Discovery, Faith, and Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972) p. 164 ff., to whom I am indebted for this point.

[265] James Kellenberger, "The Falsification Challenge," *Religious Studies*, No. 5 (1969), p. 74.

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